



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

“Middling’ Canes return home, take 4-1 beating from Leafs

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour says his team’s margin for error is thin.

Against the Toronto Maple Leafs, even thinner.

The Leafs, a team loaded with skill, playmakers and finishers, were too much for the Canes on Tuesday, taking a 4-1 victory at PNC Arena.

The Canes, in their first game home after a West Coast road trip, played without center Jordan Staal, still sidelined with a concussion. Power forward Micheal Ferland was back in the lineup after missing four games with a concussion, then left the game in the first period.

Canes defenseman Calvin de Haan left the ice bleeding in the first after being high-sticked by the Leafs’ William Nylander. De Haan was stitched up and returned to the game. Ferland did not.

Brind’Amour said Ferland “didn’t feel right.” He had no other update on his condition but the implication was more concussion symptoms for Ferland, who leads the Canes with 11 goals.

The Canes (13-12-4) squandered four minutes of power-play time after Nylander’s double minor. They did score on a second-period power play, Justin Williams with the goal, but couldn’t beat Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen again.

“That was a frustrating one,” said Williams, the Canes’ captain. “The commitment from the team that we all have to buy into wasn’t there tonight from everybody.”

After losing the first two games on the road, the Canes beat the Anaheim Ducks 4-1 on Friday and came back to Raleigh to play six of the next seven at home. Maybe get on some kind of a run. That was the Canes’ mindset.

“There’s huge urgency,” Williams said. “We’re middling, which is what we’ve done the past few years and it’s not good enough and we need to get a string (of wins) together. I keep saying that.”

The Canes’ best stretch was their 4-0-1 start, when they won four straight after an overtime loss to the New York Islanders in the opener. They have not won more than three in a row since but have had a five-game losing streak (0-4-1).

The Canes were two points out of third place and playoff position in the Metropolitan Division after Tuesday’s games, but with two other Metro teams -- the Pittsburgh Penguins and New York Rangers -- ahead of them. Boston and Montreal, both Atlantic Division teams, hold the two wild-card spots.

Tyler Ennis scored for the Leafs in the first, banging in a rebound, and Morgan Rielly scored at 13:51 of the second for a 2-1 lead a little more than a minute after the Williams goal tied it.

The Leafs killed off a Canes power play in the third, then made it 3-1 as Patrick Marleau took a pass from Nylander off the rush and beat goalie Petr Mrazek, who played well much of the game.

“The second goal really deflated us,” Brind’Amour said. “The third one kind of broke our backs. You can feel the bench ... we have trouble scoring right now and they felt like that was it, and obviously it was.”

Center John Tavares, who has tormented the Canes for years, scored his 19th of the season in his 700th career game for a 4-1 lead.

On Rielly’s goal, Canes defenseman Dougie Hamilton was in front of the net and inadvertently knocked the puck past Mrazek on Rielly’s centering pass.

“It was one of those nights where everything goes wrong,” said Hamilton, who had a minus-4 rating.

With the four minutes of power-play time after de Haan was high-sticked, the Canes managed two shots. Too many passes, not enough shots.

“On the power play we were right there and decided to make that extra pass,” Brind’Amour said. “That’s not our game. We’re not built that way.”

The Canes did score on the power play when Sebastian Aho carried the puck to the blue line, then found Williams alone to his left. Williams beat Andersen high to the glove side.

“We needed everyone on-board tonight,” Brind’Amour said. “Everyone needed to play a good game and I don’t think we got that.”



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Canes' return flight from the West Coast made an emergency landing

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes' return flight from their recent West Coast road trip had an unexpected, unsettling stop.

The Canes' charter flight early Saturday morning made an emergency landing at Tulsa International Airport in Tulsa, Okla. The Swift Air flight originated in Long Beach, Calif., after the Canes' 4-1 win over the Anaheim Ducks on Friday night.

Mike Sundheim, the Canes' vice president of communications, said there was a noxious smell in the airplane cabin. The pilots announced it as an emergency situation and those seated near the emergency exits were guided through the procedures of an emergency landing.

Sundheim said when the Boeing 737 landed in Tulsa at 4:20 a.m., there were fire trucks and other emergency vehicles on hand.

"I've never been through anything quite like that," Canes forward Jordan Martinook said Monday. "Whenever you smell

smoke you get a little worried. We went down pretty quick from whatever, 35,000 feet, and landed pretty fast. Check that one off the bucket list, I guess."

Firefighters inspected the plane during the two and one-half hours on the ground, both in the cargo holds and in the main cabin to check out the vents from which the burning odor was emanating, Sundheim said.

Sundheim said an on-board mechanic determined the source of the odor was a malfunctioning circuit board on the air data computer. Repairs were made and the flight continued. There were no injuries.

The Canes returned to Raleigh at 9:10 a.m.

"That happens quite a bit," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Every team goes through it. Talk to the guys in this league and there are some hairy flights. We do a lot of flying."

From waivers to Charlotte and back to the Canes. Goalie Scott Darling gets another chance.

By Chip Alexander

For Scott Darling, going on waivers and being assigned to the Charlotte Checkers was not a totally pleasant experience.

Going to the minors, the Carolina Hurricanes goalie could handle. Darling has been there before. That's the hockey side of things and he accepts it.

"But it has been kind of a logistical nightmare," Darling said in an interview Monday. "Car here, house here, girlfriend here, dog here. Going to Charlotte, living in a hotel, not having a car, that stuff is a little annoying.

"But the guys on the team are awesome. They've been great to me, the staff has been great to me, the coaches, everybody. That was nice."

Now, he's back. Recalled Sunday by the Canes as goalie Curtis McElhinney continues to recover from an injury, Darling returned to practice Monday and was to be Petr Mrazek's backup in Tuesday's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at PNC Arena.

Squeezed out

Darling, 29, was placed on waivers Nov. 29 by the Canes, who decided three goalies on the roster was one too many. With McElhinney, a waiver-wire pickup from the Leafs, playing well and Mrazek returning from an injury, Darling went on NHL waivers, cleared the next day and was sent to the Checkers, the Canes' AHL affiliate.

Following a three-game stretch in which Darling allowed eight goals on 105 shots and twice beat his old team, the Chicago Blackhawks, he gave up eight goals on 43 shots in losses to the Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Islanders. He was 2-4-1 for the season, with a 3.14 goals-against average and .892 save percentage.

After a troublesome first season with the Canes, Darling returned this year in much better physical shape and with a self-professed more positive attitude. But he injured a hamstring in the Canes' last preseason game and never found a consistent goaltending groove.

General manager Don Waddell said he talked with Darling and his agent about why Darling was going on waivers.

"I think it was pretty clear," Darling said.

And to be assigned to the Checkers?

"It was fine with me," Darling said.

'I felt good'

Darling started four of the Checkers' five games, going 2-1-0 with a 2.70 GAA and .897 save percentage. It was his second assignment with Charlotte this season, having gone down for a conditioning stint after his preseason injury.

Asked to assess his play, Darling said, "Good. I felt good. One period wasn't my best, but it was kind of a shootout game and the period ended 3-3. Other than that I thought I played well."

The Checkers played a road game Friday against the Hartford Wolf Pack, winning 7-4, then the Springfield Thunderbirds on Saturday to complete a back-to-back. Darling started both games, but left the Springfield game after the second period as Jeremy Helvig took over in net.

"I had some cramps in my legs," Darling said. "It's been a couple of years since I played back-to-back with some some travel and stuff like that. Nothing major. I'm fine."

Back with the Canes

Darling said he was watching on a TV monitor when the Checkers scored twice in the final minute of regulation to tie the score --- after an empty-net goal by Springfield made it a



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4-2 game -- and then won 5-4 in overtime on Trevor Carrick's goal. Helvig earned his first AHL win.

"Those guys down there, when their backs are against the wall, can score," Darling said. "At Hartford we were down 3-1 and (Janne) Kuokkanen scored two goals in about 20 seconds. They've got some talent down there."

Hurricanes need more than minus-4 from Hamilton

By Luke DeCock

At least Dougie Hamilton got his shot on goal. That streak – now 194 games old – stayed alive on an otherwise dismal night for Hamilton and the Carolina Hurricanes.

But especially for Hamilton.

More than a third of the way into the season, the Hamilton acquisition hasn't quite worked out as planned. It's hard to imagine things going any worse than they did Tuesday. Hamilton was on the ice for all four of the Toronto Maple Leafs' goals in a 4-1 loss, accidentally tipping one between Petr Mrazek's legs for one and turning the puck over at the offensive blue line leading to a two-on-one the other way for another.

The turnover wasn't even the worst part. Hamilton might not have been able to catch up with the play, but he started coasting at the blue line, long before the Leafs scored. It was a bad look on a bad night already – a career-worst minus-4 for Hamilton, and while plus/minus sometimes isn't a great measure of performance ... sometimes, it is.

"It was just the kind of night where everything goes wrong," Hamilton said. "I'll just try to learn from it, and try to get better, obviously."

Still, Tuesday wasn't the issue. This loss wasn't Hamilton's fault any more than it was Mrazek's. Hamilton wasn't very good, but it was a total team effort in many ways and things would have been worse if Mrazek hadn't been so sharp early. When even Sebastian Aho can't score when left alone in front of the net, things aren't going to go well.

The concern over Hamilton's play is a longer-term issue, Tuesday's goals just being an example of the defensive inattention that has become chronic. Some of that was expected when the Hurricanes acquired him, along with Micheal Ferland, from the Calgary Flames during the June draft. But they were also expecting an elite offensive player as well, the one who scored 17 goals last year. They haven't gotten that, either.

Rod Brind'Amour is willing to cut him some slack on the latter, even with just the three goals and 10 points, because he likes

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said he watched replays of the Checkers games. And Darling's play? "He was fine," he said.

With McElhinney still sidelined, Darling is back with the Canes. It's hard to say when or if he will get a start.

what he sees when Hamilton has the puck. But he sees what everyone else does when Hamilton doesn't.

"He's got to be better," the Hurricanes coach said. "There's no question, in my opinion. He knows it. We've talked about it. He's supposed to be one of our best defensemen. We expect more. Not offensively. To me, he's going to make those plays and create offense, but he hasn't had any luck at all. He's had some real good looks this year and nothing's gone in for him. But he needs to play hard away from the puck, too."

There's a whole legend surrounding Hamilton around the NHL, one that attempts to explain how a ninth overall pick is on his third team at age 25. He didn't want to party with his teammates in Calgary. Who cares? He's been known to read a book or two, which makes him some sort of outcast. None of that stuff matters, least of all in this market, where players are generally left to themselves and no one's asking him to be a vocal leader.

No one's asking him to be anything he isn't.

But he is being asked to be what he's capable of being on the ice, and if not a comprehensive two-way defenseman – although he's clearly an exceptional talent with the ability to put it all together – at least not a liability in his own zone.

The Hurricanes went back to the Jacob Slavin-Brett Pesce pairing late, although Brind'Amour said that had as much to do with shaking things up as anything else. But he had been looking at that before Pesce was hurt a month ago, and the Hurricanes may end up reuniting that old duo for defensive purposes instead of continuing to send Hamilton and Slavin out together.

This is an old story: the Hurricanes have no margin for error. Tuesday was a great example of that, as things went from 1-1- to 4-1 in a hurry with Jordan Staal out and Ferland lasting less than a period Tuesday with an apparent recurrence of his concussion issues and Aho gone cold. The way this team is built, it needs Hamilton at his best to be at its best. There's no room for anything less. That's true of everyone, but especially him.



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THE ATHLETIC

Things to know about Adam Fox: He gets points at a crazy rate and wants in the NHL ASAP — all good for the Canes

By Sara Civian

“Hello? Is this the man, the myth, the legend Adam Fox?”

The giggle on the other line confirmed it was, in fact, the Harvard defenseman averaging 1.82 real life points per game.

I always knew he was good. He always knew he was good. The Carolina Hurricanes, who are confident they can get their unsigned trade acquisition under contract, always knew he was good. You’re completely mistaken if you think he was an afterthought in the trade of the summer.

At no point in his career was he hiding from us — he’s at least hovered around the point per game mark ever since his first year playing Bantam in Long Island.

But what’s happening right now is just absurd.

Seven multi-point nights. Five goals on 30 shots. His PNHLe, an offensive statistic used to project a player’s point potential at the NHL level and compare prospects across leagues, is 117. The next closest defenseman is the coveted Quinn Hughes, at 91.

“If you see him entering the offensive zone,” says Tim Gleason, head of Carolina’s defensive development, “nine times out of 10 he’ll make the play.”

Fox will be the first one to tell you he didn’t imagine kicking off his junior year with 20 points (5G, 15A) in 11 games. He didn’t imagine it because it’s more of a byproduct than his objective. But hey, he’ll take it.

He laughed again trying to explain how all the points keep coming.

“Good bounces?”

The nerve of this man to blame 1.82 points per game on good bounces.

If you’ll forgive him, it’s because he’s not at all focused on the ridiculousness of his statistics — even if everyone else is. Ignoring the stats is a concept as cliché as “good bounces,” but this is actually how Fox is.

How about that time it took him 21 games to score a goal last season.

Then boom.

Hat trick with an assist on top.

“I was just saving them up,” he told me at the time, with all the dry sense of humor you’ll ever find in hockey.

He’s unbothered when he scores, he’s unbothered when he doesn’t.

He’s even unbothered when he’s scrolling through Twitter, spots his name on an infamous Bob McKenzie trade tweet and realizes his rights have been traded from Calgary to Carolina in a package with Dougie Hamilton and Micheal Ferland.

“It was weird for me, being traded as a prospect,” he said. “But after I saw the tweet the GMs from both sides started calling me.”

That’s when it hits you.

His consistency as a puck-mover and his stranglehold on the neutral zone deserve more credit than his flash. If we’re keeping score, both deserve more credit than any of the so-called bounces.

Those four-point nights might rope you in, then when you start watching Fox play you’re captivated by so much else.

As mystified as the rest of us, The Athletic’s J.D. Burke tracked four of his games this season. Turns out he was as much of a menace in the neutral zone as he is on the scoresheet.

His defensive numbers from No Man’s Land, at 5-on-5:

Controlled Entries Allowed Percentage: 25 percent
Uncontrolled Entries Allowed Percentage: 28 percent
Break-up Percentage: a whopping 46 percent (!)

Neutral zone Fox is the Fox I’d always known. That he hasn’t regressed on defense and is racking up nearly two points per game is scary. Part of the point production is that he’s finally getting adequate time on the power play — he’s already scored three goals on the man advantage, one more than he finished with last season.

“Well, they’re actually using him on the power play now,” Gleason quipped. “It’s an exciting time in his career, it’s exciting to watch offensively.”

He would know. He’s already traveled to a few Harvard games to watch Fox. The 11-year NHL veteran gives the 20-year-old NHL hopeful feedback and advice, though there’s not much necessary in the advice column these days.

Will he be making those plays for the Hurricanes? As an unsigned prospect, he’s aware of the speculation surrounding his future. He’s quick to shut it down.

“I know people think I have some plan to sign with the Rangers because of where I grew up,” the New York native said. “But my dream, my goal, is to play in the NHL. As soon as possible.”

To drive that point home, here’s what we know:

The Hurricanes are very confident they will sign him, and I’ve heard that was actually a bigger piece of the trade than people might’ve thought.

If he signs with the Hurricanes he can play immediately, but if he wanted to sign elsewhere he’d have to stay at Harvard for another year and enter free agency.

^“My goal is to play in the NHL as soon as possible.”



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It would be straight up rude to the rest of the NCAA if he were to stay at Harvard terrorizing the rest of the league for another season.

If we want to Galaxy Brain this, Fox seems to really appreciate Gleason and his visits. Knowing a team is willing to invest in you and go that extra mile matters.

If the Hurricanes can assure him there's a spot for him when he's NHL-ready (so, like, yesterday) this shouldn't be an issue.

So what should you know about Boy Wonder when he makes that jump?

Dellow: A look at which first lines are producing (and which ones aren't)

By Tyler Dellow

If there's a Brian Burke philosophy that I share, it's that the NHL is a superstar driven league. Everywhere he went, Burke looked to get stars for the top of his lineup. Ultimately, it's hard to win four rounds of the playoffs if you're going to be playing series in which the other team's best players are better than yours. With that in mind and thinking about who will be around into May or June, I wanted to take a look at what teams are getting this year with the forward who meets the following criteria on the ice at 5-on-5:

- Played at least half of his team's games;
- Highest average 5-on-5 time on ice of all forwards dressed for the game.

Before getting into it, it's worth remembering that whenever you do something like this, even if your peg is the forwards, you're still implicitly looking at the rest of the team. The results are the product of more than just the forwards involved. That's kind of the challenge for management in figuring out where their teams need to go — which changes do you need to make to get to the highest level? It also bears mentioning that this is more of a high level view type thing, as opposed to going deep into the weeds of why things are happening.

The starting point for any analysis of how individual parts of teams are working is goal difference. Here's how the NHL's 31 teams have done at 5-on-5 this year with the team's highest ATOI forward on the ice. For the sake of convenient reading and writing, I'm just going to call these "first lines" from here on out. (For those curious, I'll append a list to the bottom of the players involved.) The red line represents league average for first lines.

Focusing on the players involved a little more than the teams, you've got 10 teams getting a goal difference of +1.0 GD/60 or better with their first line on the ice. The players serving as first-line proxies on those 10 teams have tended to be Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon, Jack Eichel, Alex Ovechkin, John Tavares, Tyler Seguin, Mark Stone, Mark Scheifele, Connor McDavid and Nikita Kucherov. That's a pretty good list of NHL superstar forwards. Stone is the most stunning inclusion on this list to me ; when he's not on the ice, the Senators are a pretty horrific team.

Los Angeles and Chicago are of particular interest, given that they're both trying and failing (at the moment) to find a way to compete in the tail end of the primes of players who helped them win multiple Stanley Cups. Los Angeles is getting

"People ask me this question all the time," he laughed, then he paused. "I must be the most boring guy in the world."

He's not much of a hobbyist. In the same way he moves on the ice, he slowed down the conversation before landing on something sharp.

"I played the clarinet when I was younger, you know, when you had to play an instrument growing up," he said. "I should just start telling people I played the clarinet and let them decide how good I was."

significantly better results with their highest ATOI forward (generally Anze Kopitar) than Chicago is with theirs (generally Patrick Kane).

At the really bad end of things, Vancouver (Bo Horvat), San Jose (Evander Kane), Detroit (Dylan Larkin), the Islanders (Mathew Barzal) and St. Louis (Vladimir Tarasenko) are all teams that catch the eye, for different reasons. Tarasenko is supposed to be a fully formed star; it's not working for St. Louis when he's on the ice. Barzal is younger but absolutely crushed it last year. The Sharks fancy themselves Stanley Cup contenders but have had their first line get caved in. Horvat and Larkin are both players who carry hopes that they'll be difference makers on contending teams in the not-to-distant future.

Once you know how things are going, you can start to get into questions of why. The following graphs are organized by GD/60, with the idea being that you can read them with a sense of whether a given team is producing goal difference or not. A good first starting point is Corsi%.

If you've got Sidney Crosby and you're getting nearly 58 per cent of the attempts when he's on the ice, good things are probably going to happen. The Penguins are basically giving six forwards a push in the offensive zone relative to the rest of the team: Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Phil Kessel, Jake Guentzel, Dominik Simon and Carl Hagelin/Tanner Pearson. It's not just that though. When Crosby's on the ice for an on-the-fly shift, he's 29th amongst NHL forwards in Corsi% (58.2 per cent) and first in GD/60 (+5.1 GD/60). His line is killing it.

The next five teams on the list by goal difference/60 haven't even been average from a possession perspective. That tells us something — there's probably some air to come out of the tires in their numbers, which we'll get to when we look at shooting and save percentage. Looking at this a little more closely, I noticed that three of the five first lines — Dallas (44.3 per cent), Colorado (46.6 per cent) and Buffalo (47.1 per cent) — are in the league's bottom four in terms of on-the-fly Corsi%. The league average first line is posting a 51.9 per cent Corsi%, so that's a lot left on the table.

Looking at Washington, their first line (Alex Ovechkin) just seems to be doing slightly worse than league average everywhere. This has to be a little troubling for the Capitals — there's no obvious area where they're struggling from a possession perspective that might be fixed with a tweak or two. They just get generally overwhelmed compared to other first lines and live off the percentages.



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Twelve of the next 13 teams are all about average or better in terms of possession. Los Angeles is a notable exception here, given that Kopitar has been good at this in the past. It's a little unnerving to see Kopitar struggling, given his age (31) and the fact that he's got another five years left on his contract after this season. It's not a huge sample when put up against the rest of his career, but you can add this to the list of blinking red lights that the Kings need to figure out.

Montreal probably deserves some special mention here, given how well their first line has done from a possession perspective. As we'll see, the percentages aren't quite as kind. As a result, the possession dominance doesn't really turn into goal dominance. That's the sort of thing that will happen when your most commonly used forward is Phillip Danault and he plays with Tomas Tatar and Brendan Gallagher most of the time. You're bringing a knife to a gun fight.

With that said, Marc Bergevin has taken a lot of heat over the years because the Canadiens have seemed sort of rudderless at times. To draw further on the wisdom of Brian Burke, they've seemed to be in violation of his dictum that you want to be going up quickly or going down quickly and that the worst place to be is in the middle. What I like about where the Canadiens are right now is that they've built an inexpensive middling team. (The Weber/Price contracts don't really fit with this model but otherwise it seems to hold up.) Given changes to the league's lottery over the years, which makes tanking less of a sure thing, trying to build a good team that leaves a bunch of money on the table so that it can go after high-end talent if and when it shakes loose doesn't seem entirely nuts.

Beyond that, you have Philadelphia, San Jose, Vegas and (surprisingly) Detroit, controlling possession at a rate above the league average for first lines. Three of those teams have had curiously bad starts relative to expectations; at this point, we can reasonably draw an inference that they're being done in by shooting or save percentage.

Unsurprisingly, the teams that are crushing it in goal difference tend to also be doing well in terms of shooting percentage with their first line on the ice.

Washington pretty much screams off the page here. They're shooting 13.3 per cent with Ovechkin on the ice. Is that sustainable? Well, here are his numbers for his career since 2007-08: 10.1, 9.0, 11.6, 8.1, 8.8, 10.3, 6.0, 8.6, 9.2, 9.8 and 10.1. I'd take the under there. The problem with that is that if the shooting percentage drops three points from here on out, there goes a quarter of the goal scoring. It's a vulnerability for the Capitals.

Outside of someone like Crosby, I tend to think of about 11 per cent as being the upper bound for what a team can sustainably shoot at 5-on-5 with their high-end talent on the ice. With Crosby, that number maybe goes up to 12 per cent. (I suspect McDavid will end up there as well.) So on a first pass, I'd expect some decline moving forward for Toronto, Colorado, Buffalo, Ottawa and Columbus. The Maple Leafs are possibly a bit of a special case — there haven't been a lot of lines over the past decade that have had two talents of the calibre of Tavares and Mitch Marner.

The Oilers number here is fascinating. How do you shoot barely eight per cent with one of the most talented players to ever step on the ice? Prior to this season, the Oilers had shot

10.2 per cent with McDavid on the ice at 5-on-5. This year they're at 8.3 per cent. That's actually a pretty good sign for the Oilers, in that it suggests that there's more offence to come with McDavid on the ice at 5-on-5.

As far as why the Oilers aren't scoring with McDavid on the ice like they did in past years, it's not really his inability to score; he was a 13.3 per cent 5-on-5 shooter entering this year and is at 11.9 per cent so far this year. It's a difference of a single goal, which isn't all that much over nearly 500 minutes — the Oilers would have another six goals if pucks were going in at the usual clip. In a way, this is a nice thing to be going wrong for Edmonton; you'd expect more pucks to go in as the season goes along.

It's not all that surprising that a lot of the teams at the bottom end of the first line goal difference scale are struggling to score — that tends to be what happens. The Islanders are pretty stunning though — they shot 9.5 per cent with Barzal on the ice last year and 6.0 per cent this year. The Islanders are making it up elsewhere at the moment, shooting almost 12 per cent when Barzal isn't on the ice. I'd expect Barzal's numbers to improve — they'd better if the Islanders are going to stay in the hunt because they won't keep shooting 12 per cent when he's on the bench.

That Detroit shooting percentage is just noxious. Dylan Larkin is the proxy for their first line and they're shooting 5.3 per cent when he's on the ice. One of the issues that rebuilding teams run into sometimes is that they have young players, good young players, but they aren't superstars. You sell them as the next big thing when they're really guys who might play down the order a little bit on a real Stanley Cup contender. Through 2017-18, Larkin wasn't an elite 5-on-5 finisher by any means, shooting 8.5 per cent. That's not particularly good for a forward — league average for forwards this year is at 10 per cent. I believe that's up a bit over past seasons but the evidence that Larkin is a high-end goal scorer is awfully light.

Add to that Anthony Mantha enduring a Riley Sheahan-esque season when on the ice with Larkin and Detroit's not getting much from their first line. They almost certainly aren't *this* bad from a true talent perspective but the lows are lower when your top line doesn't have really top end players.

Finally, save percentage. This will be the statistic over which forwards have the least control. Some guys will benefit from pucks staying out, some won't. Speaking of guys who haven't had that benefit...

Look, this hasn't been Vladimir Tarasenko's best season. Still: good lord. More than a third of the way into the season and he's sailing along with an .868 on-ice save percentage. There's a lot undermining the results for St. Louis's first line but you can't overcome those goaltending numbers.

At the other end of things, Arizona, Dallas, Los Angeles and Edmonton all stand out as teams that are probably due some significant downward correction in the save percentage department with their first line on the ice. Edmonton's probably best situated of those teams to deal with it — the Oilers are due some more goals and are outperforming the typical first line in terms of scoring. Arizona, who just lost Antti Raanta for what seems likely to be the rest of the season, is not well placed to deal with it. Not quite on the same level but still due for some regression are the Avalanche, Jets, Bruins and



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Hurricanes. (I believe this is the first time I've ever thought the Hurricanes were due to have the goaltending level off.)

So where does all of this leave us, in terms of identifying teams that really have the high-end first line to go late in the season? Well, despite Pittsburgh's struggles, Crosby's still an absolute monster. My instinct was that the first line success in Colorado and Buffalo was a little illusory, but then you contrast them with Toronto, the shape of their performance is pretty similar in terms of why they're succeeding. Eichel hasn't been a big on-ice shooting percentage player to this point in his career, but then neither was MacKinnon at the start of last year. Even high-end guys can take time to figure out how to apply their tools in the NHL.

There are huge red flags around the Capitals by virtue of the extent to which they're relying on shooting percentage. I'd probably withhold judgment on the Stars for the time being — they've suffered a lot of injuries to their defence so far this year.

I haven't had much to say about Toronto, Tampa Bay and Winnipeg throughout this piece — they look fine. Stick them on the contenders list. You really can't say enough about Ottawa with Mark Stone on the ice. When he's not on the ice, Ottawa's performance has a similar shape to that of the 2014-15 Buffalo Sabres who, of course, were tanking. They're a running a bit hot in terms of shooting percentage when he's on the ice but they're otherwise at the top end of this list on merit. Stone can't re-sign until Jan. 1, but if he can't reach an extension in Ottawa, the Senators are going to be in a position to really alter the landscape of Cup contenders. Columbus is in a somewhat similar position, although their first line hasn't hit Ottawa's heights this year and the team isn't a mess.

McDavid is McDavid. Whenever the Oilers get a team around him, they're a contender. Somewhat similarly, I think the Bruins are going to move up the rankings here too, assuming Patrice Bergeron hits a run of good health. Outside of this group, there are a couple of lines that really stand out to me as having some promise in terms of making the leap up as the year rolls along: Calgary, Carolina (stop me if you've heard this before, if they start scoring), Philadelphia, Nashville, Vegas and San Jose. In a lot of cases, the difference between

the first line on those teams and the ones that are having a lot of success right now comes down to getting saves or not.

As far as the rest of the league goes, it's harder to see a path for them to elite production from their first line this year. These aren't necessarily the sorts of things that you can fix overnight either. Different cities will have different solutions — it'd be great to see Vancouver's young forwards with a good defence — but it's more of a long-term issue. However it's accomplished, it's seemed virtually impossible to win in the NHL without doing so.

Forwards Used

ANA: Rickard Rakell (6 GP), Ryan Getzlaf (26)
ARI: Clayton Keller
BOS: David Pastrnak
BUF: Jack Eichel
CAR: Sebastian Aho
CBJ: Artemi Panarin (28), Pierre-Luc Dubois (1)
CGY: Johnny Gaudreau
CHI: Jonathan Toews (1), Patrick Kane (30)
COL: Nathan MacKinnon
DAL: Tyler Seguin
DET: Dylan Larkin
EDM: Connor McDavid (29), Leon Draisaitl (1)
FLA: Aleksandr Barkov
LA: Anze Kopitar (29), Alex Iafollo (1)
MIN: Jason Zucker
MTL: Phillip Danault
NJ: Taylor Hall
NSH: Ryan Johansen
NYI: Mathew Barzal
NYR: Mika Zibanejad
OTT: Mark Stone
PHI: Claude Giroux (2), Sean Couturier (26)
PIT: Jake Guentzel (3), Sidney Crosby (25)
SJ: Evander Kane
STL: Vladimir Tarasenko
TB: Nikita Kucherov
TOR: John Tavares
VAN: Bo Horvat
VGK: Jonathan Marchessault
WPG: Mark Scheifele
WSH: Alex Ovechkin



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NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes wilt against high-powered Leafs

Mistakes prove too much for Carolina to overcome

By Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — The Toronto Maple Leafs may not have looked like surefire Stanley Cup contenders Tuesday, but the Carolina Hurricanes continue to look like a team that can't get over the hump and enter the playoff conversation.

The Leafs scored twice in the first half of the third period and coasted to a 4-1 win over the Hurricanes in front of 11,907 on Tuesday at PNC Arena.

"Right now, we're not committed enough to doing it every single time we're out there," Hurricanes captain Justin Williams, who scored Carolina's lone goal, said. "And that was a frustrating one because we were right there, as I said, and just (not) giving quite enough."

That seemed particularly true of defenseman Dougie Hamilton, who was on the ice for all of Toronto's goals and posted the first minus-4 of his career.

After Williams tied the game on the power play thanks to a nice feed from Sebastian Aho, Hamilton redirected the eventual game-winner into his own net. He then turned the puck over and seemed to give up on the backcheck as a 2-on-1 developed that extended the lead to two.

"Well, he's got to be better. There's no question, in my opinion," coach Rod Brind'Amour said when asked about Hamilton's play since coming over from Calgary this offseason. "I think he knows it. We've talked about it. He's supposed to be one of our best defensemen and we expect more. ... He needs to play hard away from the puck, too, and be better. Because right now our margin is tight. We know that."

The Maple Leafs dominated the first and opened the scoring in the eighth minute of the game when Tyler Ennis picked up a rebound and flipped the puck into the open net for a 1-0 Toronto lead.

Carolina bounced back in the second, deftly killing off a Hamilton penalty, then immediately drawing a call on Toronto defenseman Ron Hainsey. On the power play, Aho feathered a pass to a streaking Williams, who wristed the puck past Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen (29 saves) for his second goal in as many games and a tie at 12:44 of the second.

The Leafs quickly answered, however, when — on a delayed penalty — a Morgan Rielly pass redirected off Hamilton's stick and past Petr Mrazek (25 saves) to restore the one-goal lead just 67 seconds later.

"We lost some battles on the walls, and on the second goal it really just, I think, deflated us," Brind'Amour said. "We had just tied it up. We need to have good shifts after scoring."

Hamilton then turned the puck over at the Toronto blue line and couldn't get back to prevent a 2-on-1, with William Nylander finding Patrick Marleau for the Leafs third goal.

"The third one kind of just broke our backs," Brind'Amour said. "I felt like, you just feel the bench go (exhales), kind of. We're having a tough time scoring right now, so I think they just felt like that was it, and obviously it was."

Carolina spoiled a good effort by Mrazek, who got the Hurricanes out of the first period with just a one-goal deficit. But the team's scoring woes combined with defensive mistakes proved too much to overcome.

"I told him we'd get him some, and we didn't," Williams said of not giving Mrazek any goal support. "So I feel we let him down, yeah."

Notes: Jordan Staal missed his second game with a concussion. ... Micheal Ferland, in his first game back from a concussion after missing four games, left in the first period and did not return. ... Andrei Svechnikov played a career-high 19:24. ... Nylander, in his third game since his contract impasse ended, had two assists and six penalty minutes. Four of those minutes came on a first period high stick to Carolina defenseman Calvin de Haan, who rushed to the room while streaming blood from above his eye and onto the ice. De Haan returned for the second period after being stitched up.



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Canes' margin for error slim and shrinking

By Adam Gold

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes lost to the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-1 Tuesday night at PNC Arena, and it's left a lot of people with skin in the game searching for answers.

From owner Tom Dundon to head coach Rod Brind'Amour to the thousands of fans who live and die with every shift, these have been frustrating times. For the owner, who has experienced loss in his business career, but who hates that feeling, these have been bitter times. For the head coach who's been through too many lean years since he last helped the Hurricanes to the playoffs (2009) the first two months of his first season have been fraught with many of the same issues that have plagued Hurricanes teams of the past several years. For the fans, well, they've seen this movie before and they don't like the outcome.

The 4-1 final is deceiving. This was a game that the Hurricanes could have won. Not because Carolina was so wonderful against the Leafs, they weren't. But, Toronto wasn't either.

Carolina mistakes were entirely responsible for three of the four goals. For a team that is already playing with a slim margin for error, gift wrapping chances for a squad as lethal as the Leafs doesn't make the hill more steep, it coats it with grease. And here we thought goaltending was going to be Carolina's downfall. First, let's understand that the Metropolitan Division isn't quite the murderer's row it was thought to be at the outset of the year. Washington is elite and Pittsburgh likely will be before too long. But, Columbus, as good as they've been, is just a few points better than Carolina and the rest of the division is about the same.

Could the Hurricanes have more points? Absolutely. Should they have more points? Probably. So, let's not lose our collective Bo Boxes just yet. There are obvious flaws in the team, the power play has been short circuiting. Sebastian Aho hasn't scored a goal past a goaltender in almost a month. It's been eight games since Tuevo Teravainen turned the light on behind the goalie. Jordan Staal, who's missed the last two games with a concussion, hasn't scored since November 2, and since that goal in Arizona went in off his body, it's worth noting that he hasn't scored with his stick since the 5th game of the year — in Minnesota.

To say that the Canes have gone dry offensively is like saying Bo Jackson had some athletic ability.

Yet, with all that, and still without any semblance of production from the likes of Justin Faulk and Dougie Hamilton, there isn't much to separate Carolina from legitimate playoff contention. That doesn't mean, however, that things are grand. More than anything, amid a season of very little good luck, the Canes are lucky as hell that they're not buried in the standings. But that luck is bound to run out if things don't change soon.

So, how to go about fixing the problems? That is the question to which I'm not sure there are satisfactory answers.

First, they will need the return of both Staal and Michael Ferland, the team's leading goal scorer with 11. Staal left the game in San Jose last Wednesday and has been in the concussion protocol since. Ferland, also dealing with a concussion, missed four games before returning against the Leafs, only to leave midway through the first when symptoms returned.

In the interim, the team is calling up Janne Kuokkanen from the Charlotte Checkers. Kuokkanen made the team out of training camp two years ago but lasted just a handful of games before being sent to the minors. This year, he was edged out for the final roster spot by Warren Foegele, but went to the Checkers and has been their best player. He's got 11 goals and 27 points in 26 games and plays in all situations. He's ready to play in the NHL and time on the ice is available for a player who can help in the offensive zone.

Next, the team has to figure out how to get more from Dougie Hamilton, who has just three goals and 10 points through the first 29 games. On top of that, Dougie has struggled in his defensive zone and was on the ice for all four Toronto goals Tuesday night. As one team official, who shall remain anonymous, pointed out, Hamilton's minus-4 night was "well earned."

Attention to detail in his own end has never been Hamilton's strength. That's fine. But, when the puck isn't going in for you, you can't give the puck away at the blue line, get beat to loose pucks because you're being too casual or score into your own goal. All three of those things happened in the last two games.

What's made it worse for the Hurricanes is that the three main players who left the team in off-season trades are all having career seasons. Jeff Skinner just scored an overtime goal in the Sabres 4-3 win over the Kings. It was his 21st goal of the season and his third OT-winner in the last seven games. In contrast, Hamilton, Faulk, Jaccob Slavin, Brock McGinn, Warren Foegele, Phil DiGiuseppe and Victor Rask have combined for 13.

Elias Lindholm has 16 goals and 34 points for Calgary. That would easily be good enough to lead the Hurricanes in goals AND points. Noah Hanifin has three goals and 11 assists which is more than any Hurricanes defenseman to date. Meanwhile the Bill Peters-led Flames are setting the pace in the Pacific Division with a 19-10-2 mark.

There are trades to be made for this team. The owner definitely wants to make a deal. But, they won't just trade to make a trade. Just like they won't rush the development of Martin Necas, who has seven assists in his last two games and 20 points in his last 18 games. And, as much as they'd love to, they can't get Harvard's season over with as fast as



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they'd like so they could sign highly touted defensive prospect Adam Fox and put him on the ice in Raleigh.

In time, Necas and Fox will be here. If things go according to plan, they'll be here for a long time. But, since when do things go according to plan for the Carolina Hurricanes? Heck, goaltending is the least of Carolina's worries and there's just no way that was expected 30 games into the year.

Brind'Amour can put prized rookie Andrei Svechnikov with Aho and Teravainen. He can reunite the dynamic duo of

defensemen, Slavin and Brett Pesce on the blue line. The team can make a trade for Sidney Crosby's mailman. The truth is that it's not going to make THAT much of a difference if the players already here don't give a little more than they have already.

It's there, somewhere. It's just hard to see through the fog of frustration.



Recap: Canes Fall to Maple Leafs

Williams scores PPG in 4-1 loss

by Michael Smith

Justin Williams tallied his second goal in as many games, but the Carolina Hurricanes fell, 4-1, to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Williams' power-play tally in the second period tied the game, but the Leafs regained their lead just over a minute later and stretched their advantage in the third period.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game.

One

The Hurricanes didn't have the start or finish they were looking for tonight, but for a very brief moment, they tied the score in the second period.

It was too brief, though, and the Leafs retook the lead and didn't look back.

"We were right there. Then, just a little not quite, just a little not quite there, just a little late - a little bit of everything adds up," Williams said. "You've got to finish games off. That was a frustrating one, absolutely frustrating."

"We said it before the game. We were playing one of the best offensive teams out there, and we needed everyone on board," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I don't think we got that."

Two

On a power play in the second period, Sebastian Aho skated up the ice and drew a trio of defensemen to him at the blue line. He saucered a pass to the tape of Williams, who then popped a shot top-shelf to tie the game at one.

It was Williams' second goal in as many games and his 103rd as a Hurricane (in 376 games), which matches his 103 goals scored in 427 games with Los Angeles from 2009-15.

Three

It didn't take long for the Leafs to nullify the Canes' equalizer. Just 67 seconds later, Morgan Reilly attempted a centering feed that bounced in off the stick of Dougie Hamilton.

It was that kind of night for Hamilton and the Canes.

"We were hanging in there, but we lost some battles on the walls on the second goal that, I think, deflated us," Brind'Amour said. "We had just tied it up, and you need to have good shifts after scoring. That was tough. The third one kind of broke our backs."

Patrick Marleau and John Tavares - who now has an absurd 24 goals and 19 assists (43 points) in 36 career games against the Canes - put the game away in the third period.

"We're not committed enough to doing it every single time we're out there. That was a frustrating one because we were right there," Williams said. "It wasn't there tonight from everybody."

Four

Micheal Ferland returned to game action tonight after missing the last four games with a concussion, but he didn't make it out of the first period. The 26-year-old forward departed after logging 5:11 of ice time and did not return to the contest with an upper-body injury.

"He just didn't feel right," Brind'Amour said.

Five

The Canes' penalty kill matched up against the fifth-ranked power play in the league tonight, and it finished a perfect 4-for-4. That improves the man disadvantage to 27-for-28 (96.4 percent) over the last 10 games.

Up Next

The Hurricanes will travel to Montreal to face the Canadiens on Thursday before a five-game homestand leads the team to the three-day holiday break.

"There's huge urgency. We're middling, which is what we've done the past few years. It's not good enough," Williams said. "We need to get a string together. I keep saying that it seems like every week. We need to get a string together."



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Projected Lineup: Maple Leafs vs. Hurricanes

Ferland returns from concussion

by Michael Smith

After spending the first week of December in California, the Carolina Hurricanes have returned east to host the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Micheal Ferland will make his return to the lineup after missing the team's last four games with a concussion.

Here is the projected lineup for the Hurricanes.

Forwards

Martinook-Aho-Teravainen
Svechnikov-Wallmark-Williams

Ferland-Bishop-McGinn
Foegele-Rask-Di Giuseppe

Defense

Slavin-Hamilton
de Haan-Faulk
van Riemsdyk-Pesce

Goalies

Mrazek
Darling

Scratches: Fleury (healthy), McElhinney (lower body), Staal (concussion)

Note: Lineup subject to change prior to opening faceoff.



Nylander gets first points in Maple Leafs win against Hurricanes

Forward has two assists; Tavares scores 19th goal of season
by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- William Nylander got his first points of the season with two assists for the Toronto Maple Leafs in a 4-1 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Tuesday.

Nylander was playing his third game since signing a six-year contract worth \$6.9 million annually Dec. 1.

"It gets you feeling good, and playing well and creating chances is important," the forward said. "I can build off of it. I'm just trying to get back as fast as possible. Every game is getting better and better."

Patrick Marleau and John Tavares scored third-period goals, and Frederik Andersen made 29 saves for Toronto (21-9-1), which had lost two in a row.

Justin Williams scored, and Petr Mrazek made 25 saves for Carolina (13-12-4).

"We said it before the game, that we were playing one of the best offensive teams in the League and we needed everyone on board tonight," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "They didn't have to play great, but everyone needed a good game, and I don't think we got that."

Tyler Ennis gave the Maple Leafs a 1-0 lead at 8:35 of the first period when he put in a loose puck at the right post.

"I thought we started real good," Toronto coach Mike Babcock said. "We came out and played. A good goal for Ennis. I thought we had a real good penalty kill tonight (4-for-5)."

The Hurricanes tied it 1-1 on the power play at 12:44 of the second period. Sebastian Aho fed Williams, who slipped behind the defense and scored inside the far post.

Morgan Rielly scored on a delayed penalty to give Toronto a 2-1 lead at 13:51 when his centering pass deflected off the stick of Hurricanes defenseman Dougie Hamilton.

"I would have liked to have put it in myself," said Rielly, whose 10th goal is an NHL career high. "It's all good."

Toronto pushed the lead to 3-1 at 5:49 of the third period when Nylander set up Marleau with a pass across the slot.

"I just saw him driving the far post," Nylander said. "I didn't really have anything to shoot at, so I just floated a pass to him."

Mitchell Marner circled the net and passed to a wide-open Tavares to make it 4-1 at 8:29. Marner has 13 assists in the past eight games.

Toronto blocked 19 shots, led by defenseman Nikita Zaitsev, who had five.

"We knew their game plan a little bit," Andersen said. "They want to throw everything at the net, and we came ready to block some shots and be in the lanes for that."

The Hurricanes are 2-4-1 in their past seven games.

"We're not committed enough to doing it every single time we're out there," Williams said. "That was a tough one because we were right there."

They said it



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"[Nylander] is a great player. There was never a doubt when he came in he was going to be ready. He's in good shape and he's very talented. It's just a matter of time. I'm sure he's going to build off it from here." -- Maple Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly

"We had that game 1-1 and we were hanging in there, but we lost some battles on the walls and the second goal deflated us. The third one broke our backs. The bench just felt like that was it, and it was." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

Need to know

Hurricanes forward Micheal Ferland left the game in the first period with an upper-body injury. He missed the prior four games with a concussion. ... Tavares played his 700th NHL game. He has 654 points (291 goals, 363 assists). ... Maple Leafs forward Auston Matthews extended his point streak to

six games (six goals, five assists) since returning from a shoulder injury. ... Maple Leafs defenseman Jake Gardiner has a five-game point streak (one goal, seven assists). ... Every Toronto skater had a positive plus-minus, except Ron Hainsey, who was even. ... The Hurricanes have scored one goal or fewer in five of the past seven games. ... Aho has a point on eight of Carolina's 16 power-play goals (one goal, seven assists). ... Rielly scored nine goals in 82 games in 2015-16.

What's next

Maple Leafs: At the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; TVAS, SUN, SNO, NHL.TV)

Hurricanes: At the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; TSN2, RDS, FS-CR, NHL.TV)



Nylander leads Maple Leafs to 4-1 win over Hurricanes

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — William Nylander can't make up for lost time with the Toronto Maple Leafs. That's not going to stop the right wing from trying.

He had a pair of assists and was active all over the ice Tuesday night in Toronto's 4-1 win over the Carolina Hurricanes.

"I'm just trying to get back as fast as possible," Nylander said.

The assists were the first two points of the season for the fourth-year forward. He missed training camp, the preseason and the first 28 regular-season games while holding out for a new contract. He signed a six-year deal worth \$41.7 million on Dec. 1, and Tuesday marked his third game back with Toronto.

Tyler Ennis, Morgan Rielly, Patrick Marleau and John Tavares scored for the Maple Leafs, who won for the third time in four road games. Frederik Andersen made 29 saves.

Justin Williams scored for the injury-depleted Hurricanes, who lost for the fourth time in five games.

The Maple Leafs (21-9-1) started the night with the second-most points in the Eastern Conference. They made do without Nylander, who scored at least 20 goals in each of the previous two seasons.

Nylander didn't have a point in his first two games back, both losses for Toronto. But he helped set up Rielly's go-ahead goal in the second period and then fed Marleau for a pretty 2-on-1 finish in the third.

"Every game is getting better and better," Nylander said.

A little rust and learning curve was expected by his teammates.

"He played no preseason games and he's playing against guys who are in midseason form," Rielly said. "It's a tough situation to come into, but he has done a great job. He has

worked very hard. He's happy to be back and we're happy to have him back."

With their top-end talent, the Maple Leafs overwhelmed Carolina. They had a 13-3 advantage in shots through the first half of the first period and dominated the opening stanza. Ennis flipped in a loose rebound for a 1-0 lead at 8:35.

A double-minor penalty for high-sticking on Nylander in the first slowed some of Toronto's momentum. The Maple Leafs were able to kill off the penalty but couldn't build on their early lead.

Williams was able to beat Andersen for a power-play goal at 12:44 in the second period to tie it at 1.

The Hurricanes played without center Jordan Staal (concussion) for the second straight game. Top scorer Michael Ferland, who missed the previous four games with a concussion, didn't make it out of the first period. He missed the final two periods with what the team called an upper-body injury.

"We were playing one of the best offensive teams in the league and we needed everyone on board," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

Rielly broke the tie at 13:51 of the second, only 67 seconds after Williams' goal, with a pass that went past Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek (25 saves) and off the stick of one of his own defensemen.

Rielly was trying to feed Andreas Johnsson but Carolina's Dougie Hamilton got his stick on the puck and pushed it past Mrazek.

Nylander stretched Toronto's lead in the third period. He set up Marleau for an easy finish of a 2-on-1 break at 5:49.

Tavares added a goal at 8:29 in the third, his team-best 19th of the season.



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Toronto coach Mike Babcock said the team will be patient with Nylander as he tries to get up to full speed.

"It's going to take him time," Babcock said.

Nylander, however, is already finding a way to help.

NOTES: The Hurricanes were just happy to be home safely after a three-game road trip. Their charter plane had to make an emergency landing in Tulsa, Oklahoma, early Saturday morning on the way back from a 4-1 win at Anaheim. The team and flight personnel could smell smoke in the cabin. The plane

eventually returned safely to Raleigh. "I've never been through anything quite like that," Hurricanes forward Jordan Martinook told the Raleigh News & Observer. "Whenever you smell smoke you get a little worried. We went down pretty quick from whatever, 35,000 feet, and landed pretty fast. Check that one off the bucket list, I guess."

UP NEXT

Maple Leafs: Play at Tampa Bay on Thursday.

Hurricanes: Play at Montreal on Thursday.



Carolina Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon is one to think outside the box

By Dave Feschuk

When the NHL's board of governors held meetings last week at a posh seaside resort in southern Georgia, Tom Dundon had the look of a man apart.

In a ballroom filled almost exclusively with men in dark suits, Dundon, who'll celebrate his one-year anniversary as owner of the Carolina Hurricanes next month, wore a dark track suit — a black Hurricanes pullover paired with Lululemon sweatpants. While such casualwear has long been a staple of the U.S. billionaire class, where the hoodie-and-sneakers wearing CEO is a staple, it hasn't yet become standard among NHL power brokers. Even so, in an interview this week Dundon said traditional suit-and-tie business attire has always made him feel "uncomfortable and restricted."

So while Dundon said he regrets any attention that came his way for standing out from his NHL peers — "I don't want to be the story. I'm just trying to be comfortable" — he's also a progressive thinker whose short time in the sport has seen him raise the prospect of more than a few changes that go far beyond meeting-room dress codes.

"I don't think hockey is that much more rooted in tradition or stuck in the past than most things," said Dundon, whose Hurricanes play host to the Maple Leafs in Raleigh on Tuesday night. "I actually find it to be pretty open-minded and progressive, the people I've met. But that doesn't mean there's not some things ..."

For one, Dundon would clearly like to see the annual tradition of the Hurricanes missing the playoffs — they haven't made it since 2009 — come to a prompt end.

"The losing just makes me insane, makes me sad," said Dundon, whose team was five points out of the final Eastern wild-card spot heading into Monday night's slate of games.

In a not-unrelated matter, Dundon is also of the belief that the league's current playoff format, wherein 16 of 31 teams earn a berth to the post-season, ought to be expanded, and not by a little bit. His playoff-expansion argument, as much as it could be seen as self-serving, makes some sense. Dundon, 46, is from a generation first exposed to the NHL when 16 of 21 teams made the post-season in the 1980s. Since then the NHL has added 10 franchises — soon to be 11 with

the addition of Seattle in 2021 — without increasing its playoff field.

"It's the best part of the season," Dundon said of the Stanley Cup tournament.

Dundon said one of the scenarios he's heard discussed would see 20 teams make the playoffs, 10 from each conference. In that configuration, Dundon tossed out the idea that the bottom four teams could engage in either a one-off play-in game or a best-of-three series to enter the fray with the top six seeds. But the details of the format aren't as important as what Dundon figures would be its effects — increases in TV ratings and hockey-related revenue that would come with including more teams in the playoff mix.

The NHL's competitive balance and hockey's random nature is such that a No. 10 seed would have a reasonable chance of knocking off a No. 1 seed. This isn't the NBA, where the haves almost invariably crush the have-nots.

In fact, if Dundon had his way, he said he'd include as many as 24 teams in the post-season while reducing the regular season from 82 to 78 games. While critics have argued expanding the playoffs would make the regular season less relevant, Dundon makes a case for the opposite.

"I just think it makes the regular season much more interesting," Dundon said. "You don't get the last two months where some teams aren't trying anymore and you get a lot of bad games. If everyone's in it all year fighting for seeds and fighting for playoffs, I think it's just a better product."

Dundon, for his part, acknowledges a considerable stumbling block to making such a change. Commissioner Gary Bettman isn't an advocate of playoff expansion. Which is not to say Bettman's mind can't change. It wasn't long ago that Bettman was among the pro-sports commissioners who saw gambling as a scourge. In October the NHL signed a sports-betting partnership with MGM Resorts. Which is perhaps why Dundon offered up a prediction of sorts.

"I think something around (playoff expansion) ultimately gets done, because there's no one that loses," Dundon said. "I will keep speaking to people about it, and we'll keep trying. I think this is something that's got a real chance."



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If change is in the air, Dundon is among those who'd also like to see the league a) hold firm to its commitment to rid "non-hockey plays" from the sport and b) do more to promote star players. As a case in point, Dundon brought up the matter of a Hurricanes home game against the Oilers last season. Although reigning league MVP Connor McDavid was in the building, there was insufficient buzz to accompany his presence.

"I was surprised. It wouldn't be like that in other leagues; the big stars carry a lot more weight. But in the U.S., (NHL) stars are pretty anonymous," Dundon said. "It was probably the worst attendance of the year. When your biggest star doesn't carry every market, I think we've all got to look at that and say, 'What can we do about that?' And I think that's something the NHL is working on. This mentality of team-first is a great mentality. But at the same time, we're in the entertainment business."

It's the entertainment business, sure, but also a traditionally conservative one. So small changes draw big attention. If Dundon raised eyebrows bringing his dress-down ethos to the board of governors meeting last week, Columbus coach John

Tortorella also turned heads when he showed up on the Blue Jackets bench wearing a team-branded hoodie.

"That was awesome," Dundon said of Tortorella's choice of clothing.

Dundon said he's had conversations with Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour about loosening his team's dress code.

"I've pushed for, 'Let the players be comfortable (in) what they wear to the arena and on the plane,' " Dundon said.

But Dundon, who lives in Dallas, said it's always worth remembering a piece of advice he received from his old friend Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA Mavericks: Never tell your coach what to do. Which isn't to say a proprietor can't offer up a suggestion or two in the name of progress.

"I've said to (Brind'Amour), 'You don't have to wear a tie every night if you don't want to.' But he's not going for it," Dundon said. "He believes in looking professional. He believes that that matters. So I'm not trying to talk him out of it. It doesn't matter to me. But it doesn't mean it shouldn't matter to somebody else."

The Hockey News

Prospect need to know: Podkolzin running wild in Alberta

The 2019 draft prospect is looking like a high first-rounder thanks to his early play for Russia at the World Jr. A Challenge. Learn more about him and more top kids in our weekly round-up.

By Ryan Kennedy

Oh, we've got international hockey goin' on, people. Sure, the world juniors are still a couple of weeks away, but the Division 1-A tournament – the one whose winner joins the WJC next season – is in full swing in Germany, with the home team starting off strong. In Alberta, the World Jr. A Challenge is underway and there's a lot of intriguing talent there, as well. Let's take a look at some of the standouts of those tourneys so far, plus others from around the hockey prospect world.

Vasily Podkolzin, RW, SKA-1946 (Rus.): I'd like to mix it up and spotlight someone else on Russia's WJAC team, but Podkolzin has just been too good – he deserves the spotlight. An incredibly gifted scorer with great puck protection skills, the 2019 draft prospect leads the tourney with four points and three goals in two games. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Jett Woo, D, Moose Jaw Warriors (WHL): He didn't get an invite to Canada's world junior camp, so Woo is taking it out on the 'Dub.' The league's player of the week with seven points in three games, Woo is a hard-hitting Vancouver Canucks pick who can be trusted in pressure situations and is now putting up nearly a point per game. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Martin Necas, C, Charlotte Checkers (AHL): So this is pretty good timing for the Czechs: Necas is on fire just a couple weeks before the world juniors begin. The AHL player of the week thanks to seven assists in two games, the Carolina Hurricanes first-rounder did some clutch work on the weekend

and now has 20 points in 22 games for the Checkers. NHL arrival: 2019-20

Moritz Seider, D, Adler Mannheim (Ger.): The top-scoring defenseman early on at the Division 1-A world juniors, Seider has put up three points in two games. The 2019 draft prospect is a big, right-shot blueliner who can wing the puck and he'll be key for the Germans as they hope to earn promotion to the top rung. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Austin Wong, RW, Okotoks Oilers (AJHL): A personal fave, Wong is a rambunctious Winnipeg Jets draft pick repping Canada West at the WJAC and coming off a two-goal effort in a win over Canada East. The Harvard commit is a physically punishing player who can also light the lamp, making him nasty to play against. NHL arrival: 2022-23

Mattias Samuelsson, D, Western Michigan Broncos (NCHC): The conference rookie of the week, Samuelsson played a big part in the Broncos' winning weekend against the defending national champs from Minnesota-Duluth. The big Buffalo Sabres prospect had a couple assists, but was also integral in shutting down the high-powered Bulldogs. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Gabriel Fortier, C, Baie-Comeau Drakkar (QMJHL): The Drakkar have vaulted to the top of the Eastern Conference and strong play from Fortier has helped. The Tampa Bay Lightning pick is fast and fearless, playing much bigger than his 5-foot-10 frame would indicate. Fortier has six points in his past four games for the squad. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Joseph Woll, G, Boston College Eagles (Hockey East): It's starting to come together for Woll after the Eagles had a tough start to their season. The Toronto Maple Leafs pick hasn't lost



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a game in more than a month and the big netminder's numbers are skyrocketing. Woll now has a .932 save percentage, not to mention two shutouts in his past three games. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Blade Jenkins, LW, Saginaw Spirit (OHL): With eight points in his past four games, Jenkins is heating up in Saginaw, where the Spirit currently sit second in their division. The New York Islanders pick brings a great combination of size and skill with

a nice shot added in to make him even more dangerous. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Akira Schmid, G, Omaha Lancers (USHL): The Lancers have struggled this season and though Schmid's .891 save percentage doesn't sound very good, he's actually been the best of five netminders used by the team this season. But the New Jersey Devils pick will use that adversity at the world juniors, where Switzerland will also be outgunned on most nights. NHL arrival: 2023-24



Recap: Hurricanes drop snoozer to the Leafs 4-1

The Hurricanes laid an egg on Tuesday night in Raleigh as they fell hard to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

By Andrew Ahr

RALEIGH — There was a buzz coming into Tuesday's game as Micheal Ferland was slated to draw back into the Carolina Hurricanes' lineup after missing four games with a concussion. His return lasted no longer than a few shifts as he exited the game midway through the first period. And he was sorely missed as the Hurricanes fought to keep it close in the first two periods but were ultimately no match for the Toronto Maple Leafs' exceptional speed and skill in an ugly 4-1 loss.

First Period

The Canes registered just three shots on goal through the first ten minutes of the game. The Maple Leafs would tally 12 in the same time frame, the best of which came on a shot from Andreas Johnsson off of a back door feed that Petr Mrazek was able to get across on and save a goal. But the Leafs would strike a few minutes later as play broke down in front of the net and Tyler Ennis found himself on the door step with an open net.

Calvin de Haan took a stick in the face from William Nylander late in the first period. He crashed to the ice and immediately skated off leaving a trail of blood. The fallout double minor penalty was uninspiring (shocker). The Canes went into the first intermission down by a score of 1-0.

Ferland disappeared from the bench sometime in the first period and it was later announced that he wouldn't be returning to the game with an upper-body injury. Let's hope that he's OK.

Second Period

de Haan was back on the ice for the second period sporting stitches between his eye and his eyebrow, indicating that his injury was a very close call. The Canes didn't look much sharper in the first half of the second, and the Leafs got close to stretching their lead to two goals after a puck glanced off the inside of Mrazek's post. Ten minutes into the period, a Dougie Hamilton stick check and a bit of embellishment from Morgan Rielly resulted in a Leafs power play that

Carolina impressively killed off with momentum that they leveraged into a power play of their own soon after.

This time the Canes delivered as Justin Williams received a feed from Sebastian Aho with a lot of speed and beat Frederik Andersen to the high glove side with a pretty shot to tie it at 1-1.

But the Leafs answered quickly. Just a minute later Andreas Johnsson received his second perfect cross crease pass and made no mistake this time as he put it through Mrazek's wickets. The Canes would earn a power play right before the buzzer after Nylander took his second minor (the first was a double minor) of the night. They went into the room down 2-1.

Third Period

The Canes started the third with a minute and a half remaining on the man advantage but it was inconsequential. Just under six minutes into the frame Nylander came flying into the zone on the wing and sauced a pass across the slot to an anticipating Patrick Marleau. He deposited it into the back of the net to make it 3-1. Soon thereafter the flood gates fully opened as Mitch Marner wrapped the net found John Tavares in the slot who buried it with no trouble. From there, the Leafs cruised home to an easy 4-1 win.

Quotes

Rod Brind'Amour

On compete level:

"Playing one of the best offensive teams out there, we needed everyone on board. We didn't have to play great, but everyone needed to play a good game and I don't think we got that."

On Ferland's early exit from the game:

"He just didn't feel right, so yeah. You know obviously right away when players say that, they're out. I can't tell you how long [he'll be out]."

On getting to the net:

"They played a better game for sure early on. We actually didn't do what we wanted to do which was get more pucks towards the net. I thought we were trying to be cute a lot of



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times. There were four or five chances in the first period that we were right in the slot and passed it away. Even on the power play, we were right there and just tried to make the extra pass, that's just not our game. We weren't playing our game early, and we always want to get to the net more."

On Dougie Hamilton:

Well he's got to be better. There's no question in my opinion. I think he knows it, we've talked about it. He's supposed to be one of our best defensemen and we expect more. Not offensively, to me he's gonna make those plays and he's gonna create offense. He hasn't had any luck at all offensively, he's had some real good looks this year and nothing's gone in for him, but he needs to play hard away from the puck too and be better because right now our margin is tight and we know that we can't make four mistakes because we're not going to outscore them.

Charlotte Checkers Corner: Wow, They're Good

You can't stop the Checkers, you can only hope to contain them.

By Justin Lape

The Charlotte Checkers continue to roll as they extended their winning streak to three games with a pair of wins this weekend which expanded their league lead to five points. Charlotte will turn their attention to three home games this week, with two against a division opponent. The Checkers now has a +21 goal differential and their power play ranks 12th in the league, with their penalty kill even better at 8th at 84%.

So truly, how good is this team?

Weekend Recap

The Checkers continued their winning ways with a 7-4 win over the Hartford Wolf Pack on Friday. Hartford struck often and early and broke out to a 3-1 lead. Forward Janne Kuokkanen scored a pair of goals just twenty seconds apart late in the first period to tie the game and tilt the ice in the direction of the Checkers.

Charlotte's high-powered offense then went to work and fired off another three unanswered goals. Martin Necas led the way with four helpers and Nicolas Roy had a strong game with one goal and three assists. Scott Darling wasn't a star in the match-up but made timely saves and stopped 20 out of 24 shots in the game en route to the win.

Charlotte followed up a very strong performance with what turned out to be one of the most miraculous games since their inception. The Checkers were down 4-2 in the third period before staging an unbelievable comeback. Jake Bean fired a shot from the point with 55 seconds remaining to cut the Springfield Thunderbirds' lead to one. Charlotte wasn't done there, as they forced the puck back into the offensive zone and Andrew Poturalski fired a quick wrist shot from between the circles that found its way into the back of the net and forced the game to go to overtime.

To finish it off, Trevor Carrick became the hero as he scored the overtime winner after Necas set him up on the play.

Twitter Ads info and privacy

Postgame Thoughts

This was a brutal one to watch. The Leafs thoroughly dominated the majority of the game and the Canes could only hold on for so long.

We assumed that Ferland's early exit was concussion related and Brind'Amour confirmed that, indicating that he wasn't feeling right. At the moment there is no timetable for his return. The team sorely missed his energy tonight against a tough adversary.

Petr Mrazek will own an ugly stat line tonight, but he played a pretty good game. All four goals were a result of defensive breakdown and this outcome could have been a lot uglier if he didn't make a few big saves.

Player of the Week

Well, who other than Martin Necas? He earned actual AHL player of the week honors with seven assists in two games. His play-making abilities were on display this weekend in Charlotte's pair of wins.

This play sums up how good of a weekend he really had:

Twitter Ads info and privacy

Head coach Mike Vellucci has said previously all Necas needed to do was...well, less and the good things would come and it seems to be paying off for the young forward. He now has 20 points in his last 18 games and shows no signs of slowing down. Whether he sees time in the NHL this season will be up to how the forwards at the NHL level play or if they'll need to throw a life raft and receive a helping hand from Necas.

Thought of the Week

What was once hope and optimism seems to have transitioned into certainty. There is simply no part of the Checkers that is under-performing at this point of the season. The defense is especially clicking despite a few blunders here and there.

Jake Bean's development is especially promising and should come as a relief to the front office in Raleigh. The prospect of Bean projecting as a bottom-4 defenseman in the NHL should give the Hurricanes flexibility as they look to improve their current roster this season.

TSN recently reported the Hurricanes are searching for a top-6 forward. The holiday trade freeze will come into effect on Dec. 19th at 11:59 p.m. If the Hurricanes make a move, it's inevitable they will deal from a position of strength and trade a defenseman. Having a budding prospect in Bean, a solid depth defenseman in Roland McKeown and a stop gap in Trevor Carrick should provide enough comfort for the Hurricanes front office to continue to be aggressive.

Looking Ahead

Charlotte finally returns home for the first time in five games. The Checkers will kick off a six-game homestand with three



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games this week. Charlotte will face off against a familiar face in Hartford on Thursday followed by a second meeting on

Saturday. The Checkers will wrap up the weekend with a Sunday matinee against the Utica Comets.



Hurricanes come out flat in loss to Maple Leafs

By Andrew Schnittker

In their first game back from a three-game road swing, the Carolina Hurricanes put in a lackluster performance in a 4-1 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs at PNC Arena Tuesday night.

The Canes (13-12-4) lost for the fourth time in five games. Forward Justin Williams scored Carolina's lone goal, and goalie Petr Mrazek stopped 25 of 29 Leafs (21-9-1) shots.

"I think we said it before the game, we were playing one of the best offensive teams out there," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We needed everyone on board. They didn't have to play great, but everyone needed to have a good game. I don't think we got that."

The Canes could have made things interesting with a better game from their power play, but went 1 for 5 with the man advantage, including two down by a goal early in the third period.

"Right now, we're not committed enough to doing it every single time we're out there," Williams said. "That was a frustrating one because we were right there and just giving them not quite enough."

After the Canes went scoreless on those two man advantages early in the third, Leafs forwards Patrick Marleau and John Tavares scored 3:20 apart on defensive breakdowns to essentially put the game away.

"The third one just broke our backs, it felt like," Brind'Amour said. "You could feel the bench. We have trouble scoring right now so I think they just felt like that was it and obviously it was."

Mrazek kept things scoreless early in the first, exploding across for a pad save on a point-blank chance for Leafs forward Andreas Johnsson. The Czech netminder made several sharp stops in the game, and was repeatedly hung out to dry by his teammates.

"He was really good early on to keep us in the game," Brind'Amour said. "First period, I don't know exactly what the chances were but they definitely had a bunch. And he was solid. He was good all night. Can't blame him on any of the goals, that's for sure"

The Leafs did take a 1-0 lead shortly after; following a failed clearing attempt by the Canes, Toronto forward Tyler Ennis picked up the rebound of a point shot and finished top shelf.

Late in the first, Carolina defenseman Calvin de Haan took a stick up high from Leafs forward William Nylander and left the ice trailing blood. Nylander was assessed a double minor for high-sticking, but the Canes mustered just two shots on goal during the resulting four-minute power play. De Haan returned to the ice in the second period.

"We actually didn't do what we wanted to do, which was get more pucks toward the net," Brind'Amour said. "I thought we were trying to get too cute. There were four or five chances first period where we were right in the slot and actually passed it away. Even on the power play, we were right there and decided to make that extra pass. That's not our team. We're not built that way. We weren't playing our game early."

Forward and leading goal scorer Micheal Ferland, in his first game back from a concussion, left the game with an upper-body injury in the first period. Brind'Amour said after the game Ferland "just didn't feel right" and didn't have any further update.

Following a successful penalty kill for the Canes in the second period, the team evened things up with a power play of its own. Williams steamed his way to the right circle, took a pass from forward Sebastian Aho and snapped a shot over Andersen's shoulder to make it 1-1.

The tie was short-lived, as defenseman Morgan Rielly gave the Leafs a 2-1 lead and the game-winning goal on a delayed penalty sequence 1:07 after Williams' tally.

"That really just, I think, deflated us," Brind'Amour said. "We just tied it up. You need to have good shifts after scoring."

The Canes will be back in action in Montreal against the Canadiens Thursday night. After that, Carolina will play five straight at home as the team looks to push up the standings.

"There's huge urgency," Williams said. "We're middling, which is what we've done the past few years, and it's not good enough. We need to get a string together. I keep saying that, it seems like, every week. We need to get a string together. This was a good game to make a statement and follow it up, push to the next level. We didn't get that."



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Checkers recall Booth, send Nastasiuk and Helvig to Florida

By Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers made a series of transactions today, assigning forward Zach Nastasiuk and goalie Jeremy Helvig to the ECHL's Florida Everblades and recalling goalie Callum Booth from the Reading Royals.

Nastasiuk joined the Checkers for their two weekend road contests last weekend but served as a healthy extra in both games.

Helvig backed up Scott Darling for Friday's win over Hartford and the first two periods of Saturday's contest before

entering the game in relief at the start of the third. The rookie netminder stopped seven of the eight shots he saw in his AHL debut and earned the overtime victory.

Booth appeared in three games during his stint with the Royals, going undefeated with a 3.00 goals-against average and a .895 save percentage.

With Darling in Carolina as Curtis McElhinney works his way back from injury, the Checkers are currently heading into Thursday's home matchup against the Wolf Pack with Booth and Alex Nedeljkovic as their goalie tandem.

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SportScan

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

1120507 Carolina Hurricanes

"Middling" Canes return home, take 4-1 beating from Leafs

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH—Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour says his team's margin for error is thin.

Against the Toronto Maple Leafs, even thinner.

The Leafs, a team loaded with skill, playmakers and finishers, were too much for the Canes on Tuesday, taking a 4-1 victory at PNC Arena.

The Canes, in their first game home after a West Coast road trip, played without center Jordan Staal, still sidelined with a concussion. Power forward Micheal Ferland was back in the lineup after missing four games with a concussion, then left the game in the first period.

Canes defenseman Calvin de Haan left the ice bleeding in the first after being high-sticked by the Leafs' William Nylander. De Haan was stitched up and returned to the game. Ferland did not.

Brind'Amour said Ferland "didn't feel right." He had no other update on his condition but the implication was more concussion symptoms for Ferland, who leads the Canes with 11 goals.

The Canes (13-12-4) squandered four minutes of power-play time after Nylander's double minor. They did score on a second-period power play, Justin Williams with the goal, but couldn't beat Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen again.

"That was a frustrating one," said Williams, the team captain. "The commitment from the team that we all have to buy into wasn't there tonight from everybody."

After losing the first two games on the road, the Canes beat the Anaheim Ducks 4-1 on Friday and came back to Raleigh to play six of the next seven at home. Maybe get on some kind of a run.

"There's huge urgency," Williams said. "We're middling, which is what we've done the past few years and it's not good enough and we need to get a string (of wins) together. I keep saying that."

But Tyler Ennis scored for the Leafs in the first, banging in a rebound, and Morgan Rielly scored at 13:51 of the second for a 2-1 lead a little more than a minute after the Williams goal tied it.

The Leafs killed off a Canes power play in the third, then made it 3-1 as Patrick Marleau took a pass from Nylander off the rush and beat goalie Petr Mrazek, who played well much of the game.

"The second goal really deflated us," Brind'Amour said. "The third one kind of broke our backs. You can feel the bench ... we have trouble scoring right now and they felt like that was it, and obviously it was."

Center John Tavares, who has tormented the Canes for years, scored his 19th of the season in his 700th career game for a 4-1 lead.

On Rielly's goal, Canes defenseman Dougie Hamilton was in front of the net and inadvertently knocked the puck past Mrazek on Rielly's centering pass.

"It was one of those nights where everything goes wrong," said Hamilton, who had a minus-4 rating.

Mrazek faced 15 shots in the first and had one of his most acrobatic saves of the season, quickly going post to post to rob Andreas Johnsson with a right-pad stop.

The Leafs' fourth line, active much of the game, provided the first goal of the game. Ennis, to Mrazek's left, was in position to flick in a rebound.

The Canes then had the four minutes of power-play time. The passing was sluggish and the chances too few, generating two shots -- for the Canes a big opportunity lost.

"On the power play we were right there and decided to make that extra pass," Brind'Amour said. "That's not our game. We're not built that way."

The Canes won a special-teams face-off early in the second. After killing off a Hamilton tripping penalty, the Canes soon were on the power play.

Sebastian Aho carried the puck to the blue line, then found Williams alone to his left. Williams beat Andersen high to the glove side and it was 1-1.

"We needed everyone on-board tonight," Brind'Amour said. "Everyone needed to play a good game and I don't think we got that."

News Observer LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120508 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' return flight from the West Coast made an emergency landing

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

The Carolina Hurricanes' return flight from their recent West Coast road trip had an unexpected, unsettling stop.

The Canes' charter flight early Saturday morning made an emergency landing at Tulsa International Airport in Tulsa, Okla. The Swift Air flight originated in Long Beach, Calif., after the Canes' 4-1 win over the Anaheim Ducks on Friday night.

Mike Sundheim, the Canes' vice president of communications, said there was a noxious smell in the airplane cabin. The pilots announced it as an emergency situation and those seated near the emergency exits were guided through the procedures of an emergency landing.

Sundheim said when the Boeing 737 landed in Tulsa at 4:20 a.m., there were fire trucks and other emergency vehicles on hand.

"I've never been through anything quite like that," Canes forward Jordan Martinook said Monday. "Whenever you smell smoke you get a little worried. We went down pretty quick from whatever, 35,000 feet, and landed pretty fast. Check that one off the bucket list, I guess."



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Firefighters inspected the plane during the two and one-half hours on the ground, both in the cargo holds and in the main cabin to check out the vents from which the burning odor was emanating, Sundheim said.

Sundheim said an on-board mechanic determined the source of the odor was a malfunctioning circuit board on the air data computer. Repairs were made and the flight continued. There were no injuries.

The Canes returned to Raleigh at 9:10 a.m.

"That happens quite a bit," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Every team goes through it. Talk to the guys in this league and there are some hairy flights. We do a lot of flying."

News Observer LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120509 Carolina Hurricanes

From waivers to Charlotte and back to the Canes. Goalie Scott Darling gets another chance.

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH—For Scott Darling, going on waivers and being assigned to the Charlotte Checkers was not a totally pleasant experience.

Going to the minors, the Carolina Hurricanes goalie could handle. Darling has been there before. That's the hockey side of things and he accepts it.

"But it has been kind of a logistical nightmare," Darling said in an interview Monday. "Car here, house here, girlfriend here, dog here. Going to Charlotte, living in a hotel, not having a car, that stuff is a little annoying."

"But the guys on the team are awesome. They've been great to me, the staff has been great to me, the coaches, everybody. That was nice."

Now, he's back. Recalled Sunday by the Canes as goalie Curtis McElhinney continues to recover from an injury, Darling returned to practice Monday and was to be Petr Mrazek's backup in Tuesday's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at PNC Arena.

Squeezed out

Darling, 29, was placed on waivers Nov. 29 by the Canes, who decided three goalies on the roster was one too many. With McElhinney, a waiver-wire pickup from the Leafs, playing well and Mrazek returning from an injury, Darling went on NHL waivers, cleared the next day and was sent to the Checkers, the Canes' AHL affiliate.

Following a three-game stretch in which Darling allowed eight goals on 105 shots and twice beat his old team, the Chicago Blackhawks, he gave up eight goals on 43 shots in losses to the Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Islanders. He was 2-4-1 for the season, with a 3.14 goals-against average and .892 save percentage.

After a troublesome first season with the Canes, Darling returned this year in much better physical shape and with a self-professed more positive attitude. But he injured a hamstring in the Canes' last preseason game and never found a consistent goaltending groove.

General manager Don Waddell said he talked with Darling and his agent about why Darling was going on waivers.

"I think it was pretty clear," Darling said.

And to be assigned to the Checkers?

"It was fine with me," Darling said.

'I felt good'

Darling started four of the Checkers' five games, going 2-1-0 with a 2.70 GAA and .897 save percentage. It was his second assignment with Charlotte this season, having gone down for a conditioning stint after his preseason injury.

Asked to assess his play, Darling said, "Good. I felt good. One period wasn't my best, but it was kind of a shootout game and the period ended 3-3. Other than that I thought I played well."

The Checkers played a road game Friday against the Hartford Wolf Pack, winning 7-4, then the Springfield Thunderbirds on Saturday to complete a back-to-back. Darling started both games, but left the Springfield game after the second period as Jeremy Helvig took over in net.

"I had some cramps in my legs," Darling said. "It's been a couple of years since I played back-to-back with some some travel and stuff like that. Nothing major. I'm fine."

Back with the Canes

Darling said he was watching on a TV monitor when the Checkers scored twice in the final minute of regulation to tie the score --- after an empty-net goal by Springfield made it a 4-2 game -- and then won 5-4 in overtime on Trevor Carrick's goal. Helvig earned his first AHL win.

"Those guys down there, when their backs are against the wall, can score," Darling said. "At Hartford we were down down 3-1 and (Janne) Kuokkanen scored two goals in about 20 seconds. They've got some talent down there."

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said he watched replays of the Checkers games. And Darling's play? "He was fine," he said.

With McElhinney still sidelined, Darling is back with the Canes. It's hard to say when or if he will get a start.

"There's not much that needs to be said," Brind'Amour said. "He knows what his job is. He's got to come here and work hard and if he

News Observer LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120510 Carolina Hurricanes

Things to know about Adam Fox: He gets points at a crazy rate and wants in the NHL ASAP — all good for the Canes

By Sara Civian Dec 11, 2018

"Hello? Is this the man, the myth, the legend Adam Fox?"

The giggle on the other line confirmed it was, in fact, the Harvard defenseman averaging 1.82 real life points per game.

I always knew he was good. He always knew he was good. The Carolina Hurricanes, who are confident they can get their unsigned trade acquisition under contract, always knew he was good. You're completely mistaken if you think he was an afterthought in the trade of the summer.

At no point in his career was he hiding from us — he's at least hovered around the point per game mark ever since his first year playing Bantam in Long Island.

But what's happening right now is just absurd.

Seven multi-point nights. Five goals on 30 shots. His PNHLe, an offensive statistic used to project a player's point potential at the NHL level and compare prospects across leagues, is 117. The next closest defenseman is the coveted Quinn Hughes, at 91.



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"If you see him entering the offensive zone," says Tim Gleason, head of Carolina's defensive development, "nine times out of 10 he'll make the play."

Fox will be the first one to tell you he didn't imagine kicking off his junior year with 20 points (5G, 15A) in 11 games. He didn't imagine it because it's more of a byproduct than his objective. But hey, he'll take it.

He laughed again trying to explain how all the points keep coming.

"Good bounces?"

The nerve of this man to blame 1.82 points per game on good bounces.

If you'll forgive him, it's because he's not at all focused on the ridiculousness of his statistics — even if everyone else is. Ignoring the stats is a concept as cliché as "good bounces," but this is actually how Fox is.

How about that time it took him 21 games to score a goal last season.

Then boom.

Hat trick with an assist on top.

"I was just saving them up," he told me at the time, with all the dry sense of humor you'll ever find in hockey.

He's unbothered when he scores, he's unbothered when he doesn't.

He's even unbothered when he's scrolling through Twitter, spots his name on an infamous Bob McKenzie trade tweet and realizes his rights have been traded from Calgary to Carolina in a package with Dougie Hamilton and Micheal Ferland.

"It was weird for me, being traded as a prospect," he said. "But after I saw the tweet the GMs from both sides started calling me."

That's when it hits you.

His consistency as a puck-mover and his stranglehold on the neutral zone deserve more credit than his flash. If we're keeping score, both deserve more credit than any of the so-called bounces.

Those four-point nights might rope you in, then when you start watching Fox play you're captivated by so much else.

As mystified as the rest of us, The Athletic's J.D. Burke tracked four of his games this season. Turns out he was as much of a menace in the neutral zone as he is on the scoresheet.

His defensive numbers from No Man's Land, at 5-on-5:

Controlled Entries Allowed Percentage: 25 percent

Uncontrolled Entries Allowed Percentage: 28 percent

Break-up Percentage: a whopping 46 percent (!)

Neutral zone Fox is the Fox I'd always known. That he hasn't regressed on defense and is racking up nearly two points per game is scary. Part of the point production is that he's finally getting adequate time on the power play — he's already scored three goals on the man advantage, one more than he finished with last season.

"Well, they're actually using him on the power play now," Gleason quipped. "It's an exciting time in his career, it's exciting to watch offensively."

He would know. He's already traveled to a few Harvard games to watch Fox. The 11-year NHL veteran gives the 20-year-old NHL hopeful feedback and advice, though there's not much necessary in the advice column these days.

Will he be making those plays for the Hurricanes? As an unsigned prospect, he's aware of the speculation surrounding his future. He's quick to shut it down.

"I know people think I have some plan to sign with the Rangers because of where I grew up," the New York native said. "But my dream, my goal, is to play in the NHL. As soon as possible."

To drive that point home, here's what we know:

- The Hurricanes are very confident they will sign him, and I've heard that was actually a bigger piece of the trade than people might've thought.

- If he signs with the Hurricanes he can play immediately, but if he wanted to sign elsewhere he'd have to stay at Harvard for another year and enter free agency.

- ^"My goal is to play in the NHL as soon as possible."

- It would be straight up rude to the rest of the NCAA if he were to stay at Harvard terrorizing the rest of the league for another season.

- If we want to Galaxy Brain this, Fox seems to really appreciate Gleason and his visits. Knowing a team is willing to invest in you and go that extra mile matters.

- If the Hurricanes can assure him there's a spot for him when he's NHL-ready (so, like, yesterday) this shouldn't be an issue.

So what should you know about Boy Wonder when he makes that jump?

"People ask me this question all the time," he laughed, then he paused. "I must be the most boring guy in the world."

He's not much of a hobbyist. In the same way he moves on the ice, he slowed down the conversation before landing on something sharp.

"I played the clarinet when I was younger, you know, when you had to play an instrument growing up," he said. "I should just start telling people I played the clarinet and let them decide how good I was."

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1120572 Montreal Canadiens

Matt Dumba scores twice as Wild rout Canadiens 7-1

JOE ZIEMER

ST. PAUL, MINN.

PUBLISHED 6 HOURS AGO

UPDATED DECEMBER 11, 2018

Matt Dumba scored twice, Devan Dubnyk made 28 saves and the Minnesota Wild took out some recent frustrations on the Montreal Canadiens in a 7-1 victory Tuesday night.

The Wild scored four times in the second period to recover from a lousy swing through Western Canada, when Minnesota dropped two of three and lost captain Mikko Koivu to injury.

Nino Niederreiter, Charlie Coyle, Eric Staal, Jared Spurgeon and Zach Parise also scored for Minnesota (16-12-2), which went 4 for 4 on the power play.

Jeff Petry scored for Montreal (15-11-5), which ended a three-game winning streak.

After taking a 1-0 lead on Niederreiter's first-period goal, the Wild exploded in the second period. Dumba started the outburst when he cashed in on the first penalty of the game. He ripped a shot off a cross-ice feed from Mikael Granlund for a 2-0 lead on the power play.



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Coyle made it 3-0 with a short-handed goal at 12:33. He ripped a backhanded shot past Antti Niemi.

Staal followed up his own rebound at 14:58 to make it 4-0, and with 1.7 seconds left in the period, Spurgeon added a second power-play goal with a one-timer.

Dumba added another power-play goal early in the third. He leads NHL defenceman with 12 goals and six power-play goals. Parise also scored on a power play.

The Wild lead quickly returned to six when, on another play, Spurgeon found Parise with a blueline-to-blueline pass and Parise buried his 14th goal of the season.

Niemi made 24 saves before giving way to Carey Price. Montreal started its three-game road trip with wins over Ottawa and Chicago. The Canadiens had won four of their previous five.

Notes: Minnesota was playing its second game without Koivu, who was injured during Thursday's 2-0 loss in Calgary. The Wild also were in danger of losing their third consecutive home game. The last time they lost three or more games in St. Paul was March 23-28, 2017.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120573 Montreal Canadiens

In the Habs' Room: 'Unacceptable' performance against Wild

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: December 12, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The philosopher George Santayana once said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

That was the case Tuesday as the Minnesota Wild crushed the Canadiens 7-1.

There were eight players in the Montreal lineup who were blissfully unaware that the Canadiens have trouble winning at the Xcel Energy Center, but have a better understanding of the history after this game.

As for the other 12 Montreal players on the ice, they must be slow learners.

Minnesota has won six in a row against the Canadiens here and they have an 8-3-0 lifetime edge, but none of those losses were as one-sided as this one.

This was the wrap-up of a three-game road trip, and most teams would be happy to win two out of three. But after a decisive win in Ottawa and a grind-it-out victory in Chicago, this game left a bad taste in the Canadiens' mouths.

"You'll take two out of three, but the way we finished tonight in unacceptable," said captain Shea Weber. "I think everyone in here knows that and we have to learn from our mistakes and be a lot better Thursday because that team (Carolina) is going to be ready for us."

"We had an opportunity to go back home with a perfect record on this road trip and we needed to be ready to play," said coach Claude Julien. "That's what happened, we weren't ready to play. We knew what we had to do to win and when you don't do it, you get exposed. It's not on one person, or two, it's on the whole team."

"The penalty kill (wasn't good), the power play was minus-1 and the 5-on-5 wasn't any better," added Julien.

"It's disappointing," added Brendan Gallagher. "We had a chance for a really good road trip and we deserved the result that we got. You can look at this two ways — it can crush us for a few games and we can show the kind of character we have in this room. Honestly I don't think we've been tested like this this year."

Gallagher gave credit to the Wild, which was led by a 29-save effort from Devan Dubnyk, who won only his second game in his last eight starts.

"You give them credit because they outplayed us in every facet on the game, but did they see our best effort? No," said Gallagher.

There was a dramatic turnaround in the Montreal penalty-killing unit. It provided one of the keys in the Chicago win Sunday as Montreal limited the Blackhawks to one goal on eight opportunities. The Wild had four power play and scored on each of them.

Antti Niemi gave up seven goals on 24 shots before he was replaced by Carey Price midway through the third period, but captain Shea Weber said he has sympathy for a seldom-used backup goaltender.

"It could have been way worse than 1-0 after the first period," said Weber. "(Niemi) kept it tight. We were giving up Grade A chances, it's not like we were giving up shots from the outside. The shots we were giving up were right in the slot, breakaways, chances that aren't okay."

As for the penalty kill, Weber said the Canadiens had a good idea of what to expect from the Wild "but we didn't execute. We were better last game and we have to get back to that."

The Canadiens were trailing 2-0 when they had their only power play. Instead of cutting into the lead, they gave up a shorthanded goal. But Weber said that goal didn't change the momentum.

"It was gone long before that," said Weber. "Our whole game wasn't good. Our power play has to be better but we also have to get back to where we were on the penalty kill."

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1120574 Montreal Canadiens

About last night ... Minny mangles Canadiens 7-1

MIKE BOONE

Updated: December 11, 2018

Would a Carey Price start have made a difference in Minnesota?

Nah!

Quote of the Night, from Mike Johnson when Price entered a 7-1 game: "Is his groin loose?"

Canadiens fans could be forgiven if their digestive systems were loose after watching their team put on a poop show.

One night after the Vikings were shut out in Seattle, the Wild scored a converted touchdown against Antti Niemi and the hapless Habs.

Not much to say about the Stinkeroo of the Season.

Four power-play goals against? Plus a shorty?

Pretty much everyone in a white jersey was bad, with gusts to awful.



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Exceptions:

- Carey Price. No idea why Claude Julien put him in, but Price stopped the nine shots he faced.
- Nicolas Deslauriers, Kenny Agostino and Michael Chaput were each plus-1.
- Noah Juulsen played 16 minutes and was not on for any even-strength goals-against.
- Jesperi Kotkaniemi went 9-4 on faceoffs.
- The aforementioned Mike Johnson was customarily superb.

And that was the ballgame.

To paraphrase the immortal words of the Shirelles, Mama said there'd be games like this.

The Canadiens are still holding down a Wildcard spot.

And while our beloved team was stinking out the Xcel Energy Center, a lovely soft snowfall meant it was beginning to look a lot like Christmas in Montreal.

So be of good cheer.

Carolina at the Bell Centre on Thursday.

Normalcy will be restored for the Hurricanes on Thursday night ... or so I've been assured.

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1120575 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens blown out 7-1 in chilly Minnesota

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: December 11, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Bruce Boudreau is an old-time coach and he had the Minnesota Wild playing old-time hockey as they used their size advantage to grind the Canadiens offence to a halt and feasted on the power play.

The result was a decisive 7-1 win for the Wild Tuesday. It was Minnesota's sixth consecutive win over the Canadiens at the Xcel Energy Center. The Wild made life miserable for Antti Niemi as they exploded for four goals in the second period.

The game was a total washout for the Montreal special teams. Montreal's penalty-kill was outstanding Sunday in Chicago but Minnesota scored on all four of its power plays. The Montreal power play not only failed to score on its one opportunity but it also gave up a shorthanded goal.

Niemi, who was making his first start since Nov. 23, didn't have the luxury of easing his way into the game. The Wild had a 7-2 edge in shots after eight minutes and most of their attempts were Grade A scoring chances.

The goaltender also had some luck because Jason Zucker hit a post and Zach Parise fanned on a shot at the tail end of a 2-on-1 break.

The pressure paid dividends for Minnesota when Nino Niederreiter scored at 14:01. Niederreiter and Charlie Coyle were both in front awaiting Jonas Brodin's shot from the point.

While the Canadiens picked up the pace to start the second period, it was Niederreiter who had the first scoring chance of the period. He went in alone after Jesperi Kotkaniemi lost the puck in the neutral zone. Niemi used the same approach that has worked so well in a pair of shootout wins this season. He waited until Niederreiter made the first move and made the save.

The Canadiens lost the momentum when Shea Weber was sent to the penalty box for cross-checking Zach Parise midway through the period. The Wild took advantage of a middling penalty-kill with its best defender in the box to take a 2-0 lead on Matt Dumba's shot from the faceoff circle.

Montreal had its chance on the power play moments later, but the wheels fell off when Charlie Coyle scored a shorthanded goal. Coyle carried the puck into the Montreal zone, cut outside Weber in front of the net and beat Niemi with a backhander.

Eric Staal made it three goals in a span of 3:48 as he beat Niemi on another close-range backhander to give Minnesota a 4-0 lead. At the time, the Canadiens were outshooting the Wild 16-15.

Nicolas Deslauriers went old school after the Staal goal when he traded punches with Nick Seeler. This was one of those bouts that are supposed to create some emotion in the team that is hopelessly behind.

It didn't work because Andrew Shaw went to the box in the final two minutes and Jared Spurgeon scored with three seconds remaining to put Montreal even more hopelessly behind.

Dumba and Parise added power-play goals in the third period. Jeff Petry scored the Montreal goal at 2:41 of the third, far too late to make a difference.

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1120576 Montreal Canadiens

Liveblog: Minnesota stomps Canadiens 7-1

MIKE BOONE

Updated: December 11, 2018

Matt Dumba's power-play goal, less than a minute into the third period, made it 6-0.

Two minutes later, Jeff Petry ruined Devan Dubnyk's bid for a shutout.

Then Zach Parise scored on a power-play breakaway, ending Antti Niemi's night.

Dumba's howitzer, 11 minutes into the second period, had given the home team a 2-0 lead.

Charlie Coyle scored a shorty 80 seconds later, and Eric Staal put the game out of reach 15 minutes into the second.

But they weren't done. Jared Spurgeon scored with a second left in the period to make it 5-0.

Minnesota dominated the first period, but Antti Niemi kept the Wild at Bay until Nino Niederreiter tipped home Jonas Brodin's point shot, 14 minutes in.

Shots were 33-30 for the home team.

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Updated: December 11, 2018

1120577 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens Game Day: Niemi to face Wild, Juulsen on verge of return

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: December 11, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Antti Niemi will start in goal against the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday (8 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).

Niemi hasn't played since Nov. 23, when he stopped 37 shots to earn a point in a 3-2 overtime loss to the Buffalo Sabres. He has a 4-2-1 record with a 3.61 goals-against average and an .893 save percentage.

The Wild will counter with Devan Dubnyk, who has only one win in his last seven starts.

"He's our guy and he has to play better. If he doesn't, it's going to be a long season for us," said Wild head coach Bruce Boudreau.

There might be another change for the Canadiens at game time. Noah Juulsen, who has missed nine games with a lower-body injury, lined up with Jordie Benn during the morning skate. Julien said he hasn't made a final decision, but the lineup in the morning suggested that Mike Reilly, who played at the University of Minnesota before joining the Wild, will be the odd man out.

Boudreau described the Canadiens as a quick team and said it will be up to the Wild to slow the Montreal rush.

"We have to get in their way, this can't be a no-hitter," said Boudreau.

Pateryn has found a home: Greg Pateryn who spent parts of five seasons bouncing around the Canadiens organization, has found a home in Minnesota.

"It's nice to be in the lineup every night," said the University of Michigan grad, who has dressed for all 29 Wild games this season.

Pateryn's fortunes began to change two seasons ago when Montreal traded him to Dallas for Benn at the trading deadline.

"It was good for me, but it took me a while to get established there," said Pateryn.

Former Stars head coach Ken Hitchcock noted that Pateryn was the eighth or ninth defenceman in training camp, but his hard work earned him a spot in the lineup a few weeks into the regular season. He set career highs for games played (73) and points (13).

While Pateryn said he was thankful for the opportunity provided by the Stars he had a chance to cash in when he became an unrestricted free agent on July 1. He signed a three-year, US\$6.75-million contract with the Wild, a substantial raise over the \$850,000 he earned last season in Dallas.

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1120578 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens at Minnesota Wild: Five things you should know

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Here are five things you should know about the Canadiens-Minnesota Wild game at Xcel Energy Centre in St. Paul, Minn., Tuesday (8 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).

The matchup: The Canadiens are coming off a 3-2 win in Chicago on Sunday and are riding a three-game winning streak. Tomas Tatar scored the winning goal with 1:17 to play and Montreal improved to 15-10-5. That's good for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. The Wild was on the wrong end of a 7-2 count Friday in Edmonton and is on a two-game losing streak. Minnesota is three points out of a playoff spot in the Western Conference with a 15-12-2 record. Minnesota is 7-3 against the Canadiens at home and has won the teams' last five meetings in St. Paul.

Look for Niemi: Canadiens head coach Claude Julien is still mulling his options, but said he is considering a start in goal for Antti Niemi. Carey Price has started the last seven games and, while he's had a day of rest, it makes sense to use Niemi so he doesn't get too rusty. Niemi, whose last game was Nov. 23 in Buffalo, has a 4-2-1 record this season with a 3.61 goals-against average and an .893 save percentage. One factor in the decision might be Price's last game in Minnesota, a 6-3 loss last November.

Weber sparks Canadiens at both ends: Shea Weber isn't showing any signs of rust after being off for nearly a year following surgeries on his foot and knee. Weber played a season-high 29:32 in the win over Chicago on Sunday and 8:32 of that total was while the Canadiens were short-handed. The Canadiens took eight penalties and killed off seven of the Blackhawks' power plays. Weber also scored a goal — his third in six games — and has five points and a plus-5 rating. He has been averaging more than 25 minutes a game.

Juulsen return on hold: Noah Juulsen is chomping at the bit, but he might have to wait until the team returns to Montreal to get back into the lineup. Julien had been targeting the Chicago game for Juulsen, but he decided to stick with the same lineup that swept Ottawa last week. Juulsen was a top-four defenceman before he suffered a facial fracture, but he'll return to a third-pairing role, which means he'll push out Jordie Benn or Mile Reilly. Reilly will probably in the lineup Tuesday because he's from Minnesota and played for the Wild.

The other guys: Goaltender Devan Dubnyk has struggled of late and that's the major reason the Wild has lost five of its last six games. Dubnyk has a 1-5 record in his last seven appearances. Mikael Granlund leads the scoring parade with 11 goals and 28 points. Zach Parise has 24 points, including a team-high 13 goals. Mikko Koivu has 21 points, but Saku's kid brother has missed the past two games with a lower-body injury and is listed as day-to-day. Veteran Eric Staal and defenceman Matt Dumba each have 10 goals.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120579 Montreal Canadiens

The anatomy of a Canadiens blowout loss to the Wild

By Marc Dumont

Dec 11, 2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Canadiens were looking to rebound after a chaotic game against the Chicago Blackhawks which resulted in a surprising, albeit underserved win.

Their game plan against the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday, however, wasn't ideal. Starting slowly, getting left behind, then finishing slowly is not the best way to win a race. Just 10 minutes into the first period the heat map signalled a worrying trend that would continue all game, culminating in a laughably easy 7-1 win for the Wild.

The Canadiens didn't do much right, so let's dive right into what went wrong.

First Wild goal — Lazy defending

Jeff Petry is the main culprit here. He starts the play by tying up Nino Niederreiter, but quickly decides it's time to stop playing defence and allows Niederreiter to easily tip the point shot.

Second Wild goal — Porous defence

The Wild scored rather easily on their first power play, which would be a recurring theme. The Canadiens should get an assist for opening up the passing lanes.

What's even more impressive is that at first glance the Canadiens seem to be working hard to stop cross-zone passes, but when you take a closer look the issue reveals itself. It's busy work. Flailing your stick around with no rhyme or reason is not solid defending.

Anyone who played Super Mario Bros 3 knows how to beat this level. It's all about timing.

To be fair, maybe Jordie Benn is trying to give the defender a cold, in which case he's playing the long game and I salute him.

Third Wild goal — Lazy offence

This is an incredibly sloppy play by Jonathan Drouin. He has two options here. Either pass it to an open teammate three feet away, or try to force a no-look pass through a bevy of Wild defenders in perfect position to intercept the puck and quickly turn it up ice for a morale-destroying shorthanded goal.

He chose ... poorly.

Fourth Wild goal — Encore: Lazy defending

Question: What does bad passing, poor support from forwards, excessive flailing and road-hockey defensive strategy rolled into one play look like?

Answer:

Fifth Wild goal — Confusing defending

If this is your defensive setup on the penalty kill, it won't end well.

Sixth Wild goal — Encore: Porous defence

At this point the Wild are taunting the Canadiens penalty killers, as evidenced by Mikael Granlund sending the puck through ... all the defenders.

Undefended passing lanes lead to bad things in the NHL. For example, something crazy like allowing four power play goals in one night.

Seventh Wild goal — Lazy, porous defence.

'Nuff said.

Final Word

Though the Canadiens gave their goaltender a brief reprieve in the second period, thanks to some sustained offensive zone play, very few of their shots came from high-danger areas.

Simply put, the Wild were faster, stronger and executed much better than the Canadiens, both at 5-on-5 and on special teams.

One telling sign of how the game went is how the fourth line performed. Though they played well and should be commended for being on the ice for the only Canadiens goal, it's never a good sign when your fourth line is the best line. They were able to match the Wild's intensity, but it's also a clear indication that the Canadiens were not the ones setting the tone. They were the ones responding to the tone set by their opponents and they were constantly one or 43 steps behind.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120580 Montreal Canadiens

Lukas Vejdemo embraces attention from Laval coaching staff as he works to translate skill into results

By Marc Dumont

Dec 11, 2018

For prospects, there's a certain risk in choosing to develop your game in Europe. Setting aside the pros and cons when it comes to the actual development side of their game, there's also a level of uncertainty that goes with it.

Unless you're an elite player, you can quickly fade from relevance when you're playing 6,000 kilometres away from the team that drafted you.

Take Lukas Vejdemo, a speedy and talented forward who is currently trying to elbow his way into the Canadiens picture.

The Swedish centre, a 2015 third-round pick whose skill level would have justified an earlier selection if not for a bout of mononucleosis during his draft year, a year that also saw Montreal pick Noah Juulsen, Matt Bradley, Simon Bourque and Jeremiah Addison.

Of those four only Juulsen, the first-rounder, remains with the organization.

Vejdemo also has to deal with the fact that because he was picked by a team that has drafted a surplus of centres since he was picked, 12 to be exact, his NHL trajectory is complicated. He may be an intriguing prospect, he's also at serious risk of falling by the wayside when it comes to the organizational depth chart.

Things change quickly in sports, especially when you're competing for attention with five to 10 new faces every year. Look no further than 2014 first-round pick Nikita Scherbak for a perfect example of this phenomenon.

However, Vejdemo has a significant advantage compared to the rest of his draft class. He's brimming with natural talent and doesn't lack confidence as to his place in the organization.

"It's always good with situations where you have to earn your spot," Vejdemo said when asked about the Canadiens' recent centre draft spree. "I feel like if I'm doing it good, I have a good chance to take a spot."

Vejdemo was actually planning on staying in Sweden for another year, but a push from the Canadiens this summer — not exactly a bad sign — convinced him to make the jump to North America.

"I had a contract this year in Djurgården," Vejdemo said. "But they [Canadiens] said that they wanted me here. They wanted to see me in the AHL and maybe in the NHL. Instead of the decision being on me, they pushed too, which indicates they wanted me here and that's a good feeling. It's a big adjustment. But it's the right time."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 12, 2018

The biggest decision of a young life would ideally be made at the perfect moment, but without the benefit of hindsight it's virtually impossible to tell when the time is right.

And while a transition period to North American hockey is inevitable for any European prospect hoping to make it to the NHL, it's easy to forget how tough it can be on a young athlete.

You trade familiarity and comfort for the unknown.

"Everything is tough to adjust to," Vejdemo said. "Moving far from home is never easy and for the first month it's really tough. You know you're going to be here for at least eight months, then there's new teammates, a new coach, and all the other stuff.

"Everything will affect you a little. Also, you can relax a little more at home, and there's not as much media. There are also more games here compared to Sweden."

The lofty expectations placed on prospects coming over from Europe tend to underestimate how difficult the transition can be.

It certainly played a part in Vejdemo's slow start to the season with the Laval Rocket. He scored just one goal and added a single assist in his first 12 games. But after the rough start, Vejdemo has started to find his rhythm, with eight points in his last 13 games as the Rocket's third-line centre.

But the Swede's value to the team goes beyond his production. He's a quick learner, and that bodes well, seeing as he plays for a coach that is relentless when it comes to giving instructions and sets very high expectations for his players.

"He's a very smart young man," said head coach Joël Bouchard, who has taken a keen interest in pushing Vejdemo to the next level.

Bouchard spoke to Vejdemo by phone this summer after the Canadiens convinced him to come to North America and even met him at his hotel when he arrived in Montreal to deliver a specific message.

"He came here for a reason, and that's to learn, to bring his game to the next level, to get used to North American hockey, and play in the NHL," Bouchard said. "That's the deal I made with him this summer right off the bat when we spoke on the phone.

"When he got here, I met him at the hotel to say 'This won't be easy. I'll be demanding. In fact, I'll be really tough on you, because I know you have potential.'"

While some players don't react well to constant pressure and heightened expectations, Vejdemo is embracing the attention he's getting from the coaching staff.

"I've never had a coach that intense," he said. "He's on his own level. But I like that, and it's good for the team, too. I know he just wants me to be the best I can be and I need to remember that when he's yelling at me.

"I need that. It's good for me. I can't relax for a second out there, because if I do, he's on me. In the long run that's really good, because I need to push hard to make it to the next level, both in practice and in games."

Vejdemo still has work to do before he can start to shop for condos in Montreal. His shot isn't great, nor is his shot rate; he has just 32 shots on goal in 25 games this season. But a lot of that has to do with his confidence. Recently, Vejdemo has been shooting more, and consequently, scoring more.

His skating is high end, as is his speed with the puck, which will be an asset when it comes to fitting in with the Canadiens' new style of play. Very few players on the Rocket roster actually have the skill level necessary to potentially earn a roster spot with the Canadiens. Vejdemo is one of them.

"He's investing in his future, he's making the proper adjustments," Bouchard said. "Is he perfect? No. But in recent weeks he's performed

quite well on the ice, and we're not just talking about scoring goals. He's been making nice plays and has become very important for our team, even when he doesn't hit the scoresheet.

"His goal isn't to come to visit Quebec and eat poutine. The goal is that he can play in the NHL for the next 15 years."

For the record, Vejdemo has yet to try poutine.

"I need to try that," he said, laughing.

If he keeps up his recent level of play he won't be going back to the Swedish league any time soon, leaving him ample time to get more accustomed to the culinary delights of Quebec.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120636 Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin's first hat trick this season leads Capitals to a rout of the Red Wings

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

December 11 at 10:31 PM

Alex Ovechkin could only laugh after he scored his first goal. Everything seems to be going in for both him and the Washington Capitals, so of course his shot that was well wide bounced off Detroit defenseman Niklas Kronwall and then redirected right into the net. He kicked up a leg, tossed his head back and chuckled at his good fortune.

When he scored again 16 minutes later, there was no luck involved: He charged down the left side of the ice on a two-on-one and then kept the puck for himself, placing his shot perfectly this time.

Then, 9:33 into the third period, Ovechkin's shot from the left faceoff circle hit the top of goaltender Jimmy Howard's extended right pad and dropped onto the ice before dribbling across the goal line. Ovechkin skated back into the glass and lifted both arms as the Capital One Arena crowd mimicked him in celebration of his first hat trick this season and the 21st of his illustrious career.

"You think maybe there are not other ways he can kind of amaze you and wow you," forward T.J. Oshie said, "but there was another example tonight."

Washington's first quarter of the season was marred by inconsistency and uneven play, but the Capitals, who have now played 30 games, have rounded into form. Tuesday's 6-2 rout of the Red Wings marked the team's third straight win, and the manner in which the Capitals are winning — this is their second straight victory by a margin of four goals — has their goal of repeating as Stanley Cup champions looking all the more possible. Ovechkin, with his league-leading 25 goals and 12-game point streak, is leading the charge just six months after he won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the most outstanding player in the postseason.

Thirteen years into his career, could Ovechkin be playing some of his best hockey?

"Um, yeah," he said. "After last year, obviously you just enjoy it. Of course you don't want to too much enjoy it, but I try to do the same thing over and over again. It's fun. Obviously you can see our team have fun right now."

Indeed, while Ovechkin's efforts have stood out, Washington again got contributions from all over its lineup against Detroit. Goaltender Braden Holtby stopped 35 shots, center Nicklas Backstrom tallied four assists,



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and in his first game back from a concussion that caused him to miss 11 games, Oshie scored a goal on a second-period power play.

The Capitals had gone 9-2-0 without Oshie, and while he was eager to get back in the lineup, his teammates' success also made staying patient easier. This was Oshie's fifth concussion, and he acknowledged that the symptoms lingered longer. Coach Todd Reirden didn't exactly ease him back into the lineup, playing him on the top line beside Backstrom and Ovechkin and on the top power-play unit, which was especially bolstered by Oshie's return.

The man-advantage had failed to score over the past three games, but Oshie's presence made the top unit whole for the first time since Nov. 14, and the Capitals were able to convert on their two opportunities. Brett Connolly scored the first goal, deflecting John Carlson's point shot, and Oshie accounted for the second, one-timing Backstrom's pass from the slot 10:06 into the second period to give Washington a 5-0 lead.

"Obviously you have to be able to score goals from that [power-play] spot, but to me it's the recovery element, it's the intensity, it's puck battles, it's just entries, running the routes properly," Reirden said. "All the little things that he does that we keep stats for on our power play . . . and where the importance lies and how your team can have success — our numbers were down in those areas on the puck recoveries and on entries. All of a sudden, that changes with him, and it had a real positive impact on our team tonight."

The Capitals again flashed their depth, getting a goal from their fourth line for the sixth time in the past five games. Center Nic Dowd set up Travis Boyd on a two-on-one 10:50 into the first period for an early 2-0 advantage, and that marked back-to-back games with a goal for Boyd, the first goals of his NHL career. He has four points in the past three games and is making a strong case to stay in the lineup as Washington's roster gets healthier.

Right wing Tom Wilson, who missed his third straight game with a concussion, skated for the first time since his injury Tuesday morning, and he is on track to potentially play in the Capitals' next game, Friday at Carolina.

Just 129 seconds after Boyd's goal came Ovechkin's first of the night, continuing another common thread in Washington's wins. Ovechkin has tallied at least one point in all 18 of the Capitals' victories, and Ovechkin has 13 goals and six assists during this 12-game point streak. More impressive is that of the 19 points he has recorded during that stretch, just one was on the power play.

He is on pace to eclipse the NHL-best 49 goals he scored last season, and if he continues averaging roughly 1.3 points per game, this will be his best season since 2009-10, when he was 24. He's 33 now, when most other players are well past their primes.

"The age he's at, to still continue to not only want to get better, but to be able to," Reirden said. "After just the way he's played the game with such a physical presence and the energy he has and the size he is, it's not easy."

On Tuesday night, Ovechkin watched with amusement as hats hit the ice in the wake of his third goal. He had only needed four shots, and as he took his seat on the bench, he was laughing once again.

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1120637 Washington Capitals

Capitals' T.J. Oshie expected to play against Red Wings on Tuesday night

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

December 11 at 12:01 PM

When T.J. Oshie arrived at the Washington Capitals' practice facility Tuesday morning, a welcome sight greeted him: his number was listed on the board, an indication he'll be in the lineup for the first time in a month. Oshie has missed the past 11 games with a concussion, and the team won't be easing him back into action against the Detroit Red Wings, plugging him onto the top line with center Nicklas Backstrom and captain Alex Ovechkin. Oshie also will resume his place on the top power-play unit.

"I think the more you get out there, the more you get involved, the quicker things come back and the quicker you feel like you're back to normal," Oshie said. "Obviously playing with two world-class players, I'm sure if I need it, they'll drag me along out there. But it's going to be more important for me to get into some forechecks, some battles, and get that physicality and that speed of the game back."

Coach Todd Reirden said Oshie is a "game-time decision," but barring a setback ahead of the game, all signs point to Oshie making his return Tuesday night. He had posted nine goals and five assists in 18 games before getting hurt, and with this being Oshie's fifth concussion, he knows it could take him some time to feel like himself on the ice. Coming back from a concussion around this time last season, Oshie went 33 games with just one goal.

"It's just keeping things simple," Oshie said. "I think typically I try to give it to those other two guys anyways and go get open. It's a simple game. It's getting your feet under you. Hopefully I get hit early, and that usually gets you into the game. . . . This [concussion] just kind of lingered for a while. But I've been good now for about a week and a half. This is the longest one I've sat out. I wanted to play last week. We were pretty careful about it, and the guys that were in the lineup did an outstanding job of allowing them to give me that rest."

The Capitals haven't had their full lineup all season, but they're on track to have their forward corps healthy by the weekend. Right wing Tom Wilson, who suffered a concussion last week, skated without contact Tuesday morning, and he could join the team for a full, contact practice Wednesday. That could have him ready to play by Washington's game at the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday. Defenseman Brooks Orpik, who had arthroscopic surgery on his right knee three weeks ago, hasn't started skating and could miss another one to three weeks.

With Oshie back in the lineup, 23-year-old winger Andre Burakovsky will be a healthy scratch Tuesday night after he had played the past two games on the first line. Burakovsky has five goals and three assists in 29 games; this is his first scratch of the season.

"I just felt like going into tonight's game that other players had taken more advantage of the opportunity than he had recently," Reirden said. "For me, it's a rewards/earned ice time situation where there's a lot of competition. What happens is when players get opportunities and they play well, then it creates competition. Some have to win, some have to lose in that competition. Right now, that's what we've chosen to go with. Now, Andre is still a very young player, huge upside, skill level is really exceptional. This is just where we're at today, and that can change day by day."

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1120638 Washington Capitals

Ovechkin's hat trick, Oshie's return help Capitals rout Red Wings



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By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times
Tuesday, December 11, 2018

On the same day the Comedy Central show "Detroitiers" was canceled, Detroit's hockey team was sent packing, too.

Alex Ovechkin posted his first hat trick of the season, T.J. Oshie scored in his first game back from a concussion and the Washington Capitals ran the Detroit Red Wings off the ice with a 6-2 win at Capital One Arena Tuesday.

Ovechkin has now scored an NHL-best 25 goals in just 30 games. That has him on pace to finish the season with 68 goals if he plays all 82 games.

"Yeah, I'll take it," Ovechkin deadpanned after the game. "Couple lucky goals."

Nicklas Backstrom added four assists. Brett Connolly and Travis Boyd also scored and Braden Holtby saved 35 shots.

The Capitals improved to 18-9-3 (39 points) with their third straight win and 10th win in their last 12.

It was the second time this month the Capitals scored five goals in the first two periods of a home game. On Dec. 2 against Anaheim, they surrendered a 5-1 lead to the Anaheim Ducks and lost a shocker in regulation. They would not let that happen twice.

"Obviously, you can see our team have fun right now," Ovechkin said. "Our team starts with our goaltending and all of the other guys. We play solid, we play calm and this helps us."

Oshie returned to game action after missing the Capitals' last 11 games with a concussion he suffered Nov. 14 against Winnipeg, when Josh Morrissey slammed him to the ice. He scored a power play goal from the slot, fitting back in as if he'd never left.

"It felt good. Obviously winning that way is a nice way to come back," Oshie said. "I don't think I messed up any of the guys' mojo."

The scoring began less than four minutes into the game on a power play. Connolly tipped in a screaming John Carlson slap shot from the point.

Boyd set up the next goal by stealing a puck in one corner of the defensive zone and clearing it up the ice. Dmitrij Jaskin retrieved it and started some tic-tac-toe passing — himself to Nic Dowd, then Dowd back to Boyd, who became the beneficiary on his own play. It was Boyd's second career goal, after scoring his first in the Capitals' last game against Columbus.

Ovechkin rang up his first goal before the period was out. It flew wide right of its target, but took a fortuitous bounce off defenseman Niklas Kronwall, changed directions entirely and found the net.

"It was kind of bad shot by me, hit Kronwall shin pad and goes in," Ovechkin said. "But sometimes you have to take those kind of goals. If you shoot the puck, different bounces and whatever happens happens, and it goes in."

The captain scored again midway through the second on a 2-on-1 breakaway after deciding not to pass to Oshie.

But Oshie got his chance moments later when Washington received another power play. With a short assist from Backstrom and a swish of his stick, Oshie scored on an unprotected gap of the net and chased Detroit goalie Jonathan Bernier from the game.

"What he provides to our power play is the ability to be in that diamond area, as we call it, and his release," Reirden said of Oshie. "He had a great chance early on in the game, they made a good save on him and he's able to convert on the one later in the game ... The other team has to respect that, but it's just, if you watch his intensity to recover pucks

and help out on battles and gain possession time, that's where I really have it at for him."

Despite his extended absence, Oshie's goal tied him with Backstrom for second-leading goal-scorer on the team (10).

Detroit got one back early in the third off a rebound, but Ovechkin ensured the result with a goal from the left circle — his "office" — and completed his first hat trick since Nov. 25, 2017.

"He's playing outstanding," Oshie said. "I think that level that he got himself to last year, right at the start of the year, he's really just kept building off that. It feels like it's continued and it's come into this year and he's feeling it. It's fun being on this side of that, when Big O is going like that."

Reirden said Ovechkin is playing the best two-way hockey he has seen out of the Russian.

"In particular, it's been his 5-on-5 play," Reirden said. "Converting on his chances and taking advantage of some fortunate breaks that went his way tonight, but he's earning it. He's doing things the right way and he's been a great leader for us so far this year."

The Capitals have a back-to-back awaiting them this weekend. After heading out of town to play the Carolina Hurricanes Friday, they'll return to Capital One Saturday to host the Buffalo Sabres, who just snapped a 5-game losing skid that followed their headline-grabbing 10-game winning streak.

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1120639 Washington Capitals

Ovechkin's hat trick keeps Capitals rolling in 6-2 win against Red Wings

By Brian McNally

December 12, 2018 12:53 AM

Capital One Arena — The stars came out for the Capitals on Tuesday night.

There was Alex Ovechkin continuing his marvelous age-33 season with a hat trick, his first since Nov. 25, 2017. Nicklas Backstrom had four more assists. That's his second four-point game in six games. T.J. Oshie returned from an 11-game absence (concussion) and scored on the power play. Evgeny Kuznetsov set up two goals.

Anything else?

It all added up to a 6-2 win against the Detroit Red Wings and Washington is rolling. With that kind of firepower why wouldn't it be? The Caps have won 11 of their past 14 games. At 18-9-3 and with 39 points, Washington is in first place in the Metropolitan Division and has a chance to build on that lead with five of its final eight games of 2018 at home.

It didn't hurt that the second-place Columbus Blue Jackets coughed up a 2-1 lead to the Vancouver Canucks at home Tuesday, allowing two goals in the final five minutes to lose 3-2 in regulation. The Blue Jackets are stuck on 34 points and suddenly the Capitals have a five-point lead in the division.

"The season is all progress," Backstrom said. "You keep building your team getting all the roles intact. Lately the last couple of games we've been playing good hockey, we've been playing with a lot of speed, we've been playing quick. That's when we're hard to play against, I think."



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The recent hot streak starts with Ovechkin, in the midst of one of the best stretches of his career. It was his 126th multi-goal game and he passed former Washington forward Dino Ciccarelli (125) for the 11th-most in league history.

"I'll take it," Ovechkin said. "Couple lucky goals."

Ovechkin has points in 12 straight games (13 goals, six assists) and 18 of his 19 points during that stretch have come at even strength – with admittedly a few empty-net tallies tossed in for good measure. He extended his NHL lead to 25 goals – four ahead of Winnipeg's Patrik Laine and Tampa Bay's Brayden Point (21).

If Ovechkin records a point against the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday he will tie his career best of 13 games set between Dec. 30, 2006 and Feb. 1, 2007. That was the year before this incredible run of sustained success began with Washington's first playoff berth in the Ovechkin era. They didn't even wear red uniforms back then. Ovechkin ranks eighth in points (38) in the NHL through 30 games.

"I don't watch much hockey so I can only go off the years I've been here but he's playing outstanding," Oshie said.

"At that level that he got himself to last year right at the start of the year ... he's really just kept building off that. It's fun being on this side of that when Big O is going like that. It's a privilege to play with him out there and you think maybe there are not other ways he can kind of amaze you and wow you but there was another example tonight."

Last year, he didn't get to 39 points until Dec. 30, which was game No. 40. He had three assists that night against the New Jersey Devils and ended that game at 41 points. He didn't get to 25 goals until a Jan. 2 game against Carolina, which was Game No. 41. Ovechkin finished with 87 points (49 goals, 38 assists) and is well ahead of that pace and halfway to his magic number of 50.

"The age he's at to still continue to not only want to get better, but to be able to," Capitals coach Todd Reirden said.

"After just the way he's played the game with such a physical presence and the energy he has and the size he is, it's not easy. He's been great in our room, the leadership is really stepped up for me, the best I've seen him lead in our room during the regular season. And then his overall play is following right along with it. I know some other years statistically have been better, but for me it's his best two-way hockey that he's played."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120640 Washington Capitals

Four reasons the Capitals beat the Red Wings

By J.J. Regan

December 11, 2018 10:17 PM

The Capitals dominated Tuesday in T.J. Oshie's return as Alex Ovechkin scored a hat trick to lead Washington to the 6-2 blowout win over the Detroit Red Wings.

Here are four reasons the Caps won.

Fast start

Bad starts were starting to become a problem for the Caps even during the team's seven-game win streak. That certainly was not the case on Tuesday as Washington jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period of the game.

Brett Connolly scored a power play goal less than four minutes in, Travis Boyd scored his second career NHL goal and Alex Ovechkin got a crazy deflection to give the Caps a 3-0 lead. It was just that kind of night for the home team.

Starts have gone from a weakness to a strength recently as Washington has now scored three goals in the first period of each of their last two games and three times in the last five games.

Connolly and Ovechkin still hot

When you're hot, you're hot. Everything just seems to be working for both Connolly and Ovechkin.

Connolly extended his point streak to five games as he deflected in a shot from John Carlson. All eyes were on the Caps' top power play unit with T.J. Oshie's return, but it was Connolly – playing in Oshie's spot on the second unit – who got Washington on the board first.

Ovechkin, meanwhile, extended his point streak to 12 games, the second longest streak of his career. Ovechkin put the exclamation point on the first period as he fired a one-timer from ten feet above the faceoff circle that was going nowhere near the net. The shot, however, deflected off of Niklas Kronwall and past a helpless Jonathan Bernier.

If you're more into the pretty goals, don't worry, Ovechkin had one of those too, as he beat Bernier clean on a two-on-one in the second period to extend the Caps' lead to 5-0.

If Ovechkin scores his second goal of the game in the second period, there's a pretty good chance three is not going to be far behind. Ovechkin finished off the hat trick in the third period as he fired a one-timer from the boards that just managed to squeak through Jimmy Howard.

The goals were Ovechkin's league-leading 23rd, 24th and 25th tallies of the season. In addition to his 12-game point streak, Ovechkin has scored in four straight games (six total goals) and has 13 goals and 19 points over that 12-game streak.

Fourth line production

The fourth line's main responsibility typically isn't to put points on the board. When a team does get production from that line, it's a pretty big bonus for the offense. The Caps got another bonus point on Tuesday with a goal from Boyd.

The goal was set up completely by the work of Dmitrij Jaskin, who won a foot race in the offensive zone to cancel out an icing call, shielded the puck away from Detroit defenseman Mike Green and passed back to Nic Dowd who made the quick pass to Boyd.

Boyd now has a two-game goal streak, which is significant considering those are the only two goals of his NHL career.

Washington seems to have found real chemistry with Jaskin, Dowd and Boyd, which is important considering the Caps lost Jay Beagle in the offseason and the fourth line was one of the few question marks for the team heading into the season.

The power play

The Caps' power play has been cold lately, going 0 for its last 8 opportunities and with zero goals in the last three games. In the past 14 games, in fact, Washington has gone only 15.4-percent on the power play since Nov. 11 – a stretch of 14 games – with six goals on 38 power plays.

Todd Reirden expressed his excitement on Monday about how Oshie's return to the lineup could spark the power play, and boy was he right. The team had a clear spark with him back, and the power play responded with a goal in each of its two opportunities on the night.

Oshie himself scored the second power play goal from his normal spot in the slot.



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1120641 Washington Capitals

T.J. Oshie a game-time decision, but will almost certainly be in the lineup against the Red Wings

By J.J. Regan

December 11, 2018 11:40 AM

The Capitals return home after a three-game road swing to host the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday (7:30 p.m., NBC Sports Washington). Caps fans may not get to see Tom Wilson, who will be out with an upper-body injury, but there are still plenty of things to watch as the Caps try to improve to 2-0 against Detroit this season.

Here are four things to watch on Tuesday.

Todd Reirden called T.J. Oshie a game-time decision, but he certainly looked and was treated like a player who would be in the lineup for Tuesday's game. Oshie – who has been out with a concussion since Nov. 14 – will be back in the lineup on Tuesday just one day after returning to practice. But he is not going to be eased back in. Oshie moves right to the top line alongside Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom and also back onto the top unit of the power play.

Oshie suffered a concussion last season after a hit from San Jose Sharks forward Joe Thornton and really seemed to struggle when he got back into the lineup. He was asked on Monday what he learned from that experience that can prepare him for what he will face on Tuesday.

"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 and the maximal effort that you get in battles and back-checking situations or even forechecking situations. It's just hard to simulate that when you're out there skating around cones and stopping on lines."

Forward Andre Burakovsky is a surprise scratch for the game. Points have been hard to come by for the 23-year-old forward who has just five goals and eight points in 29 games.

How does Bowey look?

Madison Bowey had to be helped off the ice during morning skate and was not putting any weight on his left leg. He slowly made his way off the ice and to the locker room, but returned soon after and jumped right back into the drills. I spoke to him after the skate and he said he took a shot off the inside of his leg, but he was fine and would be good to go for the game.

The team also did not seem concerned as Jonas Siegenthaler stayed on the ice after the skate to get extra work with the scratches. It certainly appears like Bowey is fine, but he may feel differently while trying to keep up with a speedy Red Wings team. How he plays and how that left leg looks is certainly something that bears watching.

The Caps' power play unit was so dominant to start the season, but it has gone cold recently and now it has fallen all the way to seventh in the NHL. Washington has not scored a power play goal in three straight games and has only three goals in its last 24 opportunities (12.5-percent).

The return of Oshie should provide a boost to that unit as Todd Reirden mentioned on Monday.

"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 and then obviously his ability to get open and just create spots for Nick or Evgeny to find him in that diamond area as we call it for the ability to finish from the middle of the ice there."

Detroit and Washington last met on Nov. 23, a game that resulted in a 3-1 win for the Caps. What was rapidly turning into a lackluster performance was saved by Wilson who scored in the second period to tie the game at 1. Wilson also added an assist in the third period.

The Caps were outshot 32-20, but Braden Holtby turned in a strong performance to keep Detroit out of the net for the final two periods of the game.

The Red Wings will be playing the second leg of a back-to-back Tuesday meaning Washington is likely to see Jonathan Bernier in net again – just as they did on Nov. 23 – after Jimmy Howard started on Monday. Bernier could only save 17 of the 20 shots he faced, but he won't have to worry about Wilson on Tuesday.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120642 Washington Capitals

Tom Wilson's brother jumps to his defense on Twitter

By J.J. Regan

December 07, 2018 12:28 PM

On Tuesday, Ryan Reaves delivered a hit to Tom Wilson that knocked the Capitals forward from the game. The hockey world has been debating whether or not the hit was clean ever since.

Reaves was ejected from the game, but the NHL did not seek any further supplementary discipline.

There are few players in today's NHL as polarizing as Wilson and of course, Tuesday's hit generated plenty of debate over whether it was dirty and whether Reaves deserved a suspension.

There were unfortunately some people who took the stance that Wilson actually got what he deserved by getting injured by the hit and that caused Wilson's brother, Peter, to jump to his defense on Twitter. "To the 'cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat' while you're listing the things that my brother 'deserved' please add winning a Stanley Cup, a multi-year contract and currently being 10th in the NHL in P/GP," he wrote. "Thanks."

The quote Peter references here is from Theodore Roosevelt.

Twitter, as we all know, is often not the place for... educated discussions. Since Wilson is seen as a villain in the eyes of many hockey fans, some have expressed their opinion that Wilson got what he deserved and his injury is karma for all the hits he has delivered in the past.

This is a dumb take. Wishing for a brain injury to anyone is deplorable whether or not you like the player.

Wilson missed Thursday's game due to what is being called an upper body injury. He is considered to be day-to-day by the team.



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1120643 Washington Capitals

More trust in Brett Connolly is leading to a career year

By J.J. Regan

December 11, 2018 7:00 AM

After all the pomp and circumstance of the Capitals' banner raising to start the season was over, a hockey game still needed to be played. That night, Alex Ovechkin and Evgeny Kuznetsov took their familiar spots on the top line. On their right, was Caps forward Brett Connolly who had earned a chance to compete for that top spot during Tom Wilson's suspension.

That night was a very early indication to Connolly that things were going to be different this season. Todd Reirden is not Barry Trotz.

Connolly first signed with Washington in 2016. A cast off of the Boston Bruins as they did not offer him a qualifying offer to retain his rights as a restricted free agent, Connolly needed a team to take a chance on him. The Caps did, signing him to a one-year deal worth \$850,000. Connolly responded with 15 goals and 23 points for Washington, earning him a new two-year, \$3 million contract to stick around.

Despite that, however, Connolly never seemed to gain the full trust of head coach Barry Trotz. Connolly averaged just 12:00 worth of ice time per game last season over 70 games.

"Obviously the last couple years you'd like to play a little more, but I knew that with the way that he was coaching and the way Barry was handling me, that was going to be my role for that," Connolly said. "I took pride in that last year, but this year's a little different."

Though Connolly's stay on the top line was brief, he is averaging over two minutes more of ice time per game than last season and it is clear Reirden envisioned him having an increased role.

"I liked how he came into camp," Reirden said. "I think we had good discussions about a plan for him going into the year. There was room for growth still in his game and he's still a young player."

"[Reirden] has been really good with me and making sure my minutes are a little higher," Connolly said. "Obviously, you've still got to earn that, but he's put me in situations to succeed. It's been nice to deliver on that a little bit."

In just 29 games this season, Connolly has five goals and 18 points. His 13 assists sit just three shy of his career high set in 2015-16 over the course of 71 games. He is currently on pace for a 50-point season which would shatter his previous career high of 27.

Increased playing time should naturally result in increased production, but Connolly has not been a passenger getting carried by better teammates. He has played all through the lineup and keeps producing regardless of the situation.

"There's a lot more trust in me to play in all situations and move up and down the lineup," Connolly said. "I've played all over the lineup which is nice. It's nice to know that when you're playing well you can be moved up at any time. It's been a really positive change for me and I'm happy that I could deliver a little bit and play well when I am given those opportunities."

In 2017, Connolly was a healthy scratch for six of the team's seven playoff games. Trotz elected to go with seven defensemen in the lineup,

something he had not done the entire season, rather than dress Connolly.

Reirden has taken a different approach this season and it is paying dividends both for the player and the team.

"He's been really important part of us getting through these injuries because we've used him on the power play in different areas as well," Reirden said. "I think he's had a strong season and not surprised to see that his numbers are following along, but to me it started with his commitment this summer and then to start the year, the confidence he had and the kind of belief in using him in a different way than maybe he's been used in the past that he could generate some higher numbers."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120644 Washington Capitals

Time to Capitalize: Alex Ovechkin tops list of 12 sell-high candidates

By Scott Cullen

Dec 11, 2018

This is like raining on a parade – and who likes to do that? – but this week's piece is about finding the players that aren't likely to maintain their current scoring pace. These are the sell-high candidates, if you can find a taker that will give you value in return.

It's important to understand that this isn't a suggestion to dump these players no matter the cost. On the contrary, the point is that these players should have value due to their production to this point in the season, as well as name-recognition in many cases, but there are reasons to think that they may not be able to continue scoring at their current rates, and it would be worthwhile to acquire another productive player in exchange.

A few things to keep in mind:

First of all, NHL teams are scoring on a higher percentage of their shots this season. Last year, in all situations, goaltenders had a .908 save percentage; this year, it's .903. So, it's reasonable enough for players to have a higher on-ice shooting percentage, but that's still a good place to find players that are due for regression.

For example, this season, there are 35 skaters that have played at least 200 5-on-5 minutes and have an on-ice shooting percentage higher than 12.0%. Last year, at season's end, there were just two (Auston Matthews at 12.78% and William Nylander at 12.03%), so players with inflated on-ice shooting percentages are going to be hard-pressed to maintain their current levels of production.

At this point last season, Steven Stamkos was the league's leading scorer, with 42 points in 29 games. He finished in 12th, with 86 points in 78 games. Evgeni Malkin was sitting 30th in the league with 27 points in 27 games, before roaring to a 98-point season. Where a player sits one-third of the way through the schedule does not mean he is destined for that spot by season's end.

Here, then, are a dozen players to consider selling while their values remain high:

Alex Ovechkin, LW, Washington – While Ovi has 22 goals in 29 games, which would be the second-highest goals-per-game rate of his career (0.76), he's generating "only" 3.86 shots per game, which would be the second-lowest rate of his career. He's an all-time great and he is still going to be a Rocket Richard threat, but his percentages (19.6 SH%),



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13.3 OISH%) are due to drop. Needless to say, if we can expect Ovechkin's production to dip to some degree, same goes for Tom Wilson (and his 30.8 SH%), too.

John Carlson, D, Washington – The league's leading scorer among blueliners last season, when he scored 68 points, Carlson is on pace for 88 points, thanks in part to an obscene 14.3 OISH%. His career on-ice shooting percentage is 9.1%, so it's hard to imagine that he keeps rolling along at this rate.

Max Domi, C, Montreal – He's been a revelation as the Habs' No. 1 center, putting up 31 points in 30 games, and the 23-year-old had a track record of a relatively high on-ice shooting percentage (9.3 OISH%) in three seasons with Arizona, but that's nothing compared to the 13.2 OISH% that he has in Montreal right now. If you can get a point-per-game player in return – maybe one that isn't so percentage-dependent – then it should be worth your while.

Matt Duchene, C, Ottawa – It might have been easier to sell high on the 27-year-old Senators center before he suffered a lower-body injury against Montreal, but he has an on-ice shooting percentage of 14.2%, contributing to his 34 points in 29 games; this even though Duchene is generating 2.14 shots per game, the second-lowest rate of his career.

Thomas Chabot, D, Ottawa – We'll stick in Ottawa for another one, as 21-year-old Chabot has been a star on the Senators blueline (33 points in 31 games), but his 13.5 OISH% is too good to be true. Tons to like about Chabot, but that point production is going to be very difficult to maintain.

Mitch Marner, RW, Toronto – He's been incredible, and forms an incredible duo with John Tavares, but 40 points in 30 games is a tough level to maintain, particularly when it comes with an on-ice shooting percentage of 13.2%. As great as Marner and Tavares have been, they may level off a bit.

Morgan Rielly, D, Toronto – The 24-year-old blueliner is having the best year of his career, and has produced 32 points in 30 games but, like several Maple Leafs, he has had percentages (13.2 OISH%) tilted in his favor. It's possible that he can still have a breakout season and not finish with 85 points.

Jeff Skinner, LW, Buffalo – He was already a bargain pickup for the Sabres, before his incredible hot start to the season, scoring 20 goals and 30 points in 30 games. However, percentages (22.7 SH%, 13.1 OISH%) have been going Skinner's way so far and the safe bet would be to expect both to come down as the season progresses.

Brady Tkachuk, LW, Ottawa – The slide may have already started, as the 19-year-old rookie has no points in his past six games, but his 12.9% on-ice shooting percentage is still likely a tad high so his 16 points in 20 games may not be a reasonable level to expect the rest of the way.

Brayden Point, C, Tampa Bay – The 22-year-old has been spectacular for the Lightning, scoring 21 goals and 41 points in 32 games, and he's getting big notice as a result, but that's also what gives him massive value on the fantasy trade market. He's shooting 24.7% and has buried nine power play goals on a Lightning power play that has been one of five teams to score better than 10.0 goals/60 with the man advantage. Why should that matter? Last year's Pittsburgh Penguins power play, which was absurd, scored 9.77 goals/60.

Keith Yandle, D, and Mike Hoffman, LW, Florida – The Panthers have another power play that has been extremely productive. Yandle has scored 19 of his 28 points on the power play this season, and it's hard to imagine that he keeps scoring a point per game while scoring more than two-thirds of his points with the man advantage. Hoffman has tallied 14 of his 28 points on the power play so the same principle applies, though to a lesser degree.

There are some players that have high on-ice shooting percentages that may be worth holding. Not because they won't regress, but maybe they still produce at a rare level. Auston Matthews has a 12.7 OISH% this

season, which is unusually high, but is somehow lower than last season's mark.

Canucks rookie Elias Pettersson is on the high side (12.4 OISH%), but he's a creative playmaker (playing with a sniper, Brock Boeser) so the on-ice shooting percentage may not crash, but Pettersson is shooting 26.8%, which almost surely will drop.

The Avalanche duo of Mikko Rantanen and Nathan MacKinnon are on the high side, even relative to where they were last season, but falling in the 11 to 12 percent range isn't so far out of line with expectations for one of the top lines in the league.

Jets captain Blake Wheeler has 16 power-play assists already and it's fair to think that's not going to continue, but as long as he's in position to feed Patrik Laine, maybe Wheeler will put up an obscene number of power-play assists – he had 34 of them last year, and is on pace for 45 this year.

Ultimately, there may be some players who will defy the odds over the course of a single season, but when playing the percentages, the odds lean towards regression for early-season outliers.

HAS HITCH FIXED THE OILERS?

One team evaluation note to keep in mind:

While it is popular to credit new head coach Ken Hitchcock for the recent uptick in the Edmonton Oilers' fortunes, it's probably too soon to start down that road, in part because the recent run of success appears to be driven by goaltending.

Under Todd McLellan this season, the Oilers generated 49.4% of score-adjusted shot attempts, while allowing 49.9 shot attempts/60. But they also had 52.4% of score-adjusted expected goals and were shooting 7.2% and had a .916 save percentage during 5-on-5 play.

In 10 games with Hitchcock, the Oilers are 7-2-1, generating 52.5% of score-adjusted shot attempts, allowing 47.3 shot attempts/60. However, they have created 50.8% of the score-adjusted expected goals, and are only shooting 6.5% at 5-on-5, but the goaltending has been better – a .931 5-on-5 save percentage (ranking third in the league in that time) can quickly change the appearance of a team's performance.

If Mikko Koskinen and Cam Talbot continue to play well, the results should be there, but if they had played well earlier in the season, the team results would have been better, too.

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1120476 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes held off after Bruins tally four goals in five minutes

Arizona Republic Published 8:07 p.m. MT Dec. 11, 2018

BOSTON – In a span of five minutes, the Boston Bruins turned a two-goal deficit into a two-goal lead.

David Krejci was just happy to be along for the ride.

Moving up to Boston's top line to fill in for the injured Patrice Bergeron, Krejci assisted on three of Boston's four goals during a second-period flurry that put away the Arizona Coyotes 4-3 on Tuesday night.

Brad Marchand scored twice, and David Pastrnak had a goal and two assists for the Bruins – all during the five-minute span midway through the second.



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"Those are two world-class players," Krejci said. "They make lots of skilled plays, so they kind of make it easy for you. ... I've just got to be at the right time at the right place, and the puck will find you."

Arizona led 2-0 before Danton Heinen and Pastrnak scored 33 seconds apart. Marchand gave the Bruins the lead two minutes later, and then added another two minutes after that to make it 4-2.

"It was those three minutes. We played a good hockey game for 50," Arizona coach Rick Tocchet said. "Two-nothing, there, we backed off."

Tuukka Rask stopped 30 shots for Boston, which beat the Coyotes for the 14th time in a row. The Bruins have won three in a row after snapping a three-game losing streak.

Coach Bruce Cassidy said the victory over Toronto on Saturday night was key.

"It can go in a hurry," he said. "Three can turn into five or six, and all bets are off and it's panic mode."

Nick Schmaltz and Nick Cousins scored 40 seconds apart for Arizona in the first period, and Darcy Kuemper made 22 saves for the Coyotes. Michael Bunting, who was making his NHL debut, scored an unassisted goal cut the deficit to 4-3 with 5 minutes left in the second.

"The guys bounced back really well," Bunting said. "You can feel bad for yourself and pack it in. We didn't do that."

The 2014 fourth-round draft pick admitted to jitters before the game, and snapped out of it during the national anthem.

"I was like, 'All right, I'm in an NHL game now,'" he said. "It's pretty special. It's something I'm going to remember for the rest of my life."

The Coyotes had a shorthanded breakaway midway through the third period, but the Bruins got back to keep them from getting a shot off. Arizona also pulled the goalie with 75 seconds left but managed just one shot on net, as time expired.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120477 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes' goaltending hopes hinge on a career backup, a waiver pickup and an AHL call-up

By Craig Morgan

BOSTON — As Antti Raanta walked through the Staples Center press box before the Coyotes faced the Los Angeles Kings on Dec. 4, he spotted this reporter and offered a faint smile and some gallows humor.

"I'm announcing my retirement tomorrow," he said. "You can have the exclusive."

At that point, Raanta was still hoping the pain in his knee was the product of minimal damage, but like the Coyotes' injury luck this season, the news was far worse. Two hours after the team touched down in Boston on Sunday for the start of a four-game trip, president of hockey operations John Chayka announced that his injury-plagued, starting goaltender would be out indefinitely — likely for the season — after surgery that proved more extensive than expected.

"The good news is that it was a great repair and his long-term health is in great standing," Chayka said. "The recovery will be a little longer than we had hoped or expected, but at the same time, again, he has the ability to preserve his long-term health. That's the main thing."

Over the second half of last season, Raanta played like one of the top five goaltenders in the league, but he was never right this season while battling through an assortment of injuries. Without him, the Coyotes have little choice but to circle the wagons, harden their resolve and support their remaining options in goal.

Privately, everyone knows the challenge of earning the franchise's first playoff berth since 2012 just got a lot tougher. Center Christian Dvorak, defenseman Jason Demers and forward Vinnie Hinostroza are also out indefinitely with injuries, forward Michael Grabner is still awaiting definitive tests on his injured right eye, and forward Alex Galchenyuk missed a 4-3 loss to the Boston Bruins at TD Garden on Tuesday with a lower-body injury.

Now, the Coyotes must chase the increasingly distant Pacific Division playoff spots without Raanta, their biggest game changer.

"Our conversations right now are about adversity," center Derek Stepan said Monday after the team's practice at Boston University's Agganis Arena. "I'm a big believer in an opportunity that is a tough challenge, but can start a tidal wave of momentum that is so big if you're able to come to the challenge and meet it. That, in an 82-game schedule, is maybe the most powerful thing if you can get some momentum on your side and get the ball rolling. We have lots of big injuries right now, a lot of key ones. It's a great opportunity to get that wave going the right way."

A goaltender's play is greatly affected by the team in front of him. It cannot be isolated from it, but it's no coincidence that the Coyotes' six-season playoff drought coincides with a lack of great goaltending for a full season. The last time they had it, they went to the Western Conference final in 2012.

Mike Smith had his moments in three of the four subsequent seasons after that outlier year, but his overall numbers were never more than average. This banged-up, bereft-of-superstars team needs more than average goaltending. It needs elite goaltending. Now, it must rely on a career backup, a waiver-wire pickup and an AHL call-up to deliver it. There's more than a little wishful thinking in that tonic, and goalie coach Corey Schwab appeared to acknowledge that when asked if he liked having a three-goalie rotation of Darcy Kuemper, Calvin Pickard and Adin Hill.

"I like having healthy goalies," Schwab quipped. "The most important thing is for Darcy Kuemper to step up. This is an opportunity. This is why we have him, and we knew coming into the season one guy doesn't play every game. Whether it's a game every third or fourth (start) or (going) for a stretch of five or six (straight), he showed that he was capable of doing that."

In 11 starts before his own lower-body injury sidelined him for the past eight games, Kuemper had a 4-5 record with a 2.71 goals-against average and a .914 save percentage that ranked 22nd in the NHL. Those are fine numbers for a backup, but if they continue at that pace on this scoring-challenged team (28th in the NHL at 2.57 goals per game), they won't do anything more than keep the Coyotes mired in mediocrity.

Kuemper didn't have much help in his return to the lineup Tuesday. The Coyotes — particularly the top line of Lawson Crouse, Nick Schmaltz and Clayton Keller — got exposed by Boston's top line of Brad Marchand, David Krejci and David Pastrnak. Boston scored four goals in a 4:50 span to erase a 2-0 deficit.

"If the other coach is going to put their best line against you, you'd better have some pride. I didn't like that line at all," coach Rick Tocchet said. "Puck management. Coming off pucks. Lazy. Just not good."

Kuemper was solid, stopping 22 of 26 shots, but he was not the game-saver the shorthanded Coyotes might need on many occasions.

"I was pretty happy with a lot of parts of my game today, but a few things, just some reads and timing — I've got to watch the video and get a little better at," Kuemper said. "I've just got to anticipate some of those passes a little bit more and give myself more of a chance."



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Adin Hill has a 4-2 record, a 1.92 goals-against average and a .939 save percentage in five starts (seven games), but he has allowed seven goals in his past two games while stopping just 53 of 60 shots (.883 save percentage). The initial buzz of being in the NHL has subsided, and if Kuemper is able to return from his injury without incident and stabilize the position, inserting the veteran Pickard as the backup and sending Hill back to Tucson of the American Hockey League for more development and more playing time might be a better option.

"Short term, he's fine. But obviously (in the) long term, we'll have to look at it," Tocchet said of Hill. "He's not going to sit on the bench. We have the luxury where he could go down there and play some games and we could always call him back up. We haven't crossed that bridge yet."

Pickard had a .932 save percentage in 16 games as an NHL rookie with the Colorado Avalanche in 2014-15 and a .922 save percentage in 22 games the following year. But he won just 15 of 50 games in Colorado's brutal 48-point 2016-17 season, posting a .904 save percentage.

"For a while there, I thought I was going to be with one franchise forever, but things change quick," Pickard said. "I think it's four different organizations now (Toronto and Philadelphia are the others). I've kind of bounced around, but I still have confidence in myself and I know I can excel at this level. I'm looking forward to that opportunity."

Pickard said he was tweaking parts of his game with the Flyers this season, but they waived him on Nov. 28 after he posted a 4-2-2 record with a 4.01 goals-against average and an .863 save percentage.

"There's always tweaks you want to add; there's tendencies," he said. "A lot of guys pre-scout goalies now and kind of have a book on you, so you have to be patient. You can't go chasing the puck, especially against skilled teams. So, be a little more patient, stay in my crease and be ready if they pass or if they shoot. ... I just want to be in position for all shots."

Schwab acknowledged that finding enough work for three goalies will be a challenge.

"We don't get a lot of practice time as it is," he said.

Playing a three-goalie rotation is nothing new to Hill, though. He did it his first season in Tucson with Justin Peters and Marek Langhamer, and he did it for a stretch again last season with the Roadrunners, sharing time with Langhamer and Hunter Miska.

"Usually in practice, whatever goalie is starting kind of decides what he wants and the other two guys kind of split," he said. "If you have three good guys, it's fun, it's healthy competition, and both Kuemper and Pickard are great guys. They're good guys to learn from, and I can watch them when I'm not in the net and whenever I get in, try to make the most of my reps."

The loss of Raanta and the current goalie-by-committee approach had some media members joking that Tocchet should spin a wheel to choose his goalie for each game. With his team on a two-game losing streak and seven points out of a playoff spot, Tocchet could not afford such humor.

"We've got some picking up to do," he said. "Adversity can pull a team together, so that's what we're looking for."

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1120478 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes Crease: Troubled times bring a top-to-bottom look at who provides best chances to win

By Cat Silverman Dec 11, 2018

The Coyotes seem to be stuck with just two choices in net this year.

There's the Vezina-caliber performances they've been getting from their starter, backup, and de facto number three. Then there's the injury list they've boasted, which has seen all three of their best chances to win at the NHL level sit out for at least one prolonged period through the first two and a half months of the year.

Now, they're facing down their worst goaltending injury news in three years.

It was around this time in December 2015, midway through what was supposed to be a bounce-back year after the team's worst-performing season in its NHL franchise history, that the club announced starter Mike Smith would miss eight to 10 weeks after undergoing core muscle surgery. The then-franchise starter made just 32 appearances that season, leaving a panicked goaltending-by-committee approach from backup Louis Domingue, journeyman Anders Lindback (who missed the back half of the season with an Achilles injury himself), and German import Niklas Treutle.

This time around, the news is both better and worse.

Antti Raanta, the team's elite-level starter, is projected to potentially miss the remainder of the season after suffering a knee injury at the end of his rehab for a different, groin-related lower-body ailment.

Losing him with just 12 games played so far this year would be devastating, given that he's the team's clear-cut best chance to win.

Unlike when Arizona lost its starter three years ago, though, the runners-up to hold down the fort are surprisingly confidence-inspiring options in the short-term.

There's still plenty of uncertainty when it comes to predicting how well any of their depth goaltenders can hold up with heavy NHL workloads, to be sure. But for the time being, it's a fairly promising group.

It's a new group from when the team lost Smith three years ago. Only one goaltender in the team's system that year — Czech-born prospect Marek Langhamer — is still retained by the club, and he's unlikely to come back from Europe after departing last year.

The team's offense is on life support, though. With the league's third-worst scoring totals, here's the lowdown on who fits in where in the team's committee of puck-stoppers — and how well they can keep the team afloat.

Antti Raanta

Undrafted free agent (trade via NYR)

Current Team: Arizona Coyotes (5-6-0, .906 SV%)

xSV%: .918, 3.3 wins/82

It's clear that losing Raanta takes a massive chunk out of the team's potential playoff value. With a .930 save percentage last season and some of the league's most consistent numbers during his NHL career, he's clearly one of the more valuable pieces John Chayka has acquired during his tenure as GM.

At this point, though, it would be disingenuous to imply that he doesn't raise injury concerns for the club. He's played in just 59 of a potential 110 games for Arizona since the team picked him up from New York, and that's a major red flag even if they were trying to give him a lighter workload than starters of the past.

When he's healthy, Raanta plays with superior positional depth and fantastic edges. He's almost always in position for a square, easy-looking save, and he tracks his rebounds incredibly well. There isn't much puck play in his game, but that seems to be the preference for the club in the Rick Tocchet era — and clearly, given that Raanta has 26 wins, three overtime losses, and three shutouts in his 59 games, the style sets them up for success.



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If he's able to return this year, there's zero question he should be the team's number one. Of their goaltenders, he's the one with the fewest question marks in his technical game, and he makes the team better just by being there.

For the time being, though, he's number one in name only. With no timetable for his return from a knee injury, the team's playoff chances have gone from legitimate to a long shot.

Darcy Kuemper

161st overall, 2009 NHL Entry Draft (via trade LAK)

Current Team: Arizona Coyotes (4-5-2, .914 SV%)

xSV%: .913, 1.4 wins/82

Kuemper's arrival in Arizona last spring brought the team an impressive future in net. The Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, native has quietly put together one of the league's more steady backup careers in the eight years since he first went pro with the AHL's Houston Aeros.

At 6 feet 5 and 215 pounds, there's a lot of goaltender to fill the net when Kuemper gets a start. He plays a prototypical "big goaltender" game, too, starting from a more conservative depth position than Raanta and coming out to challenge shots rather than retreating from a more aggressive starting point.

Like a number of the league's big goaltenders, though, he sometimes tends to allow his size to give him some leeway when it comes to his technical precision. Where Raanta sets hard edges and doesn't often float on his knees in his crease, Kuemper has been known to overshoot his positioning and need a wild, highlight-reel stop possible due only to his significant wingspan and pad reach. He's much happier to play the puck than Raanta, as well, which has occasionally left him outside of his own net when he needs to be there.

It's tough to truly figure out how well Kuemper can handle the undoubtedly massive workload looming, because he lacks a sufficient single-season sample size. His heaviest start volume has been just 28 games, and he's never appeared in more than 31 contests in a single season — so while he has a strong enough looking .912 career save percentage, it's tough to tell what will happen when he's required to take on a bigger role. That 31-game season saw him post his second-lowest single-season save percentage, a .905 in all situations, and it was his struggle to take over for former Wild starter Niklas Backstrom that prompted the Wild to pick up their current starter, Devan Dubnyk, in the first place.

According to The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn, Kuemper's current numbers are right about where his career predicts they'll be by the time the season is over. He projects to be well above league average based on his sample size, but still a full tier below Raanta in terms of just how far above league average it appears he can be.

The best hope, likely, is that one of the team's other two NHL-caliber netminders in the system will be able to split the workload with him. All signs, both in his visual game and based on his prior numbers, point to him putting up his best work when he's making a limited number of starts on the year.

If that isn't possible, though, the team can at least be assured that he's agile enough to steal them a game or two. So even if Raanta's season is lost, the team doesn't seem likely to sink all the way to the basement just yet.

Calvin Pickard

49th overall, 2010 NHL Entry Draft (via waivers)

Current Team: Arizona Coyotes (no data; 4-2-2, .863 SV% with Philadelphia)

xSV%: .908, -0.8 wins/82

Call him Cal, he's insisted — although it might be more accurate to just call him "Prove-it Pickard" at this point in his career.

He was once the most promising netminder in the Colorado Avalanche system, looking like a steal after he was passed over by the Coyotes at the 2010 NHL Draft for first-rounder Mark Visentin. His NHL numbers through a handful of limited seasons in Colorado were among the best for young backups, and he'd remain one of the more highly regarded up-and-comers until Colorado's disastrous 2016-17 campaign.

He was unable to shoulder the workload through the back half of that Colorado season following Semyon Varlamov's season-ending injury right around the new year, though, struggling to survive what essentially became a one-man show through winter and spring. After posting a .923 save percentage or better in six of his first nine games for the Avalanche that year, he started taking on a heavier workload in December and then picked up nearly all of the slack starting in January. Of his 50 appearances that season, just 18 of them came in the first three months of the year; he then appeared in all but 11 of the team's games from the time Varlamov was shut down in January until the season blissfully came to an end.

Pickard was able to put up a strong performance at the 2017 World Championships even following such a tough season, but saw nearly a full season without NHL action after getting claimed by the Vegas Golden Knights and then waived and subsequently dealt to Toronto. His stellar AHL performance with the Marlies earned him a Calder Cup championship alongside fellow prospect Garret Sparks, but a waiver pick-up by the Philadelphia Flyers this year brought him back into the world of goaltending chaos behind a floundering Philadelphia defense.

Chayka insinuated during the Coyotes conference call about Raanta's injury on Sunday that Pickard is now working through some tweaks in his game with goaltending coach Corey Schwab. He told The Athletic earlier last week that he'd tried to make a fairly significant change in his game "a bit too quickly" with Philadelphia, which left him feeling a bit off-balance behind the pressure-filled Flyers lineup and struggling to produce quality starts.

His Flyers numbers don't inspire much confidence, but if his work with Schwab is able to fix some of those problems he encountered on Broad Street, there's a surprisingly optimistic outlook to having him on board.

With his Flyers numbers, Pickard sits just a little below league average, projecting per Luszczyszyn to finish with a .908 save percentage and -0.8 wins/82 games compared to the league average.

When Dom took Pickard's 2018-19 stats with Philadelphia out of the equation, though, he jumped to a .911 expected save percentage and 0.3 wins/82 games. Given the difficulty of his workload that final season in Colorado — and the fact that he still managed to put up a .904 save percentage behind the league's worst team in two decades — there's a very good chance that he could prove immensely useful to a far more competitive Coyotes roster this winter.

Adin Hill

76th overall, 2015 NHL Entry Draft

Current Team: Arizona Coyotes (4-2-0, .939 SV%)

xSV%: .913, 1.3 wins/82

By the time Adin Hill hits the NHL full-time, there's a chance he may be seven feet tall.

Ahead of the 2015 NHL Draft, the Comox, British Columbia, native was listed as 6 feet 3. By the time he arrived at training camp with Arizona following his selection in the third round, he'd been bumped up to 6-4; now, he's listed as 6-6 three years later and seeming to get bigger.

Despite what seems to be a never-ending growth spurt for the 22-year-old Hill, though, he's managed to exhibit an impressive level of control over his game as he moves from juniors to the minors to the NHL. Unafraid to use his lanky frame to span the width of the goal line between



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the posts, he's both impressively flexible and seemingly in total control as he faces shots.

The biggest concern for a young player is the risk of poor habit-making during a tough season, especially when he's playing a level above where he was supposed to be coming into the year. It's already started to show, too, as he took on a heavier workload for the Coyotes in Raanta and Kuemper's absences. His rebound control has always been a bit of a concern, but his tougher games against the Washington Capitals and the San Jose Sharks at home this past week saw him fail to keep his shoulders back and his chest up when he went to make saves.

According to Luszczyzyn's model, Hill's numbers will likely come back to earth the more he plays this year, which isn't a huge surprise. After posting two perfect relief performances, a shutout, and two one-goal games in his first five appearances this year, he's posted two sub-.900 games in the pair of home appearances he made against Washington and San Jose.

He still gives the team a better chance to win than a league-average goaltender would, assuming he continues playing at the level he has through his seven appearances. But if Pickard is able to improve his game enough to shoulder the NHL load with Kuemper, it's likely in Hill's best interest to rejoin the Roadrunners for another deep playoff push. His performance with Hunter Miska last year was crucial for the team's division-topping finish in the AHL Pacific, and another multiround playoff appearance would be the perfect way to prep him for a potential shift to NHL backup as early as next season.

Hunter Miska

Undrafted free agent, signed April 2017

Current Team: Tucson Roadrunners (6-3-1, .901 SV%)

Miska made his NHL debut earlier this year with some mixed results. He stopped eight of nine shots faced, cleaning up the mess after Kuemper got pulled for allowing five goals Nov. 13 in Detroit.

It certainly wasn't anywhere near Golden Knights backup Malcolm Subban's NHL debut, which saw the then-Bruins backstop allow three goals on three shots to get pulled early in the second period. But it also wasn't as memorable as the rookie debut shutout earned by Maple Leafs backup Garret Sparks three years ago, nor was it an anticipated appearance; Arizona likely doesn't feel comfortable putting Miska against NHL competition just yet.

He's calm and confident, aware of his own game and ready to put in the work to fix what he needs to. But he's also still a little sloppy with his edgework, sliding out of position when he fails to lock into place before dropping to his knees to make a stop, and his puck-handling skills can sometimes make even Mike Smith's fondest fans feel a little nervous.

The good news, of course, is that it would take the Coyotes losing three goaltenders long-term for there to be any need to rush Miska to the NHL now — and even then, he'd likely sit second fiddle to his Tucson partner, Hill, for the majority of the games. He's instead going to get the rest of the year to work on tightening up his game in the AHL, which should give the club another quality option for next season in case of a call-up.

Merrick Madsen

162nd overall, 2013 NHL Entry Draft (trade via PHI)

Current Team: Tucson Roadrunners (4-1-0, .906 SV%)

It would require a mumps outbreak or a last-minute injury during an East Coast road trip for the team to see Merrick Madsen make his NHL debut this year.

That's not a knock against Madsen, the Harvard-educated prospect who arrived with Arizona via trade in the summer of 2017. He's proved to be a capable netminder and a good leader and teammate, as evidenced by his captaincy for the NCAA program at Harvard and his three shutouts in just eight AHL games this year.

He does need some work cleaning up his game at the pro level, though, which is hardly a shock. Drafted in 2013 out of the New Hampshire-based Proctor Academy, he made a stop in North Dakota with the NAHL prior to heading to Massachusetts for his collegiate career; it's a thorough and effective goaltending development path, but one that also tends to take a little more time to travel.

Like Hill, Madsen catches eyes with his 6-foot-5 frame, but he's still got some room to grow consistency-wise. He boasts a coachable personality and an analytical mind, and he thoroughly enjoys talking shop, so there's a good chance that he'll be NHL-ready one day.

That day just isn't today. Luckily for him, the team's depth chart is rich enough that he won't have to worry about that; for now, all he needs to focus on is helping Tucson thrive in Hill's absence.

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Mortenson replaces Skanska Hunt as general contractor for KeyArena renovation now topping \$800 million

Originally published December 11, 2018 at 10:57 am Updated December 11, 2018 at 12:37 PM

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

A new general contractor with vast experience in sports venue construction has been named for a KeyArena renovation project now expected to exceed \$800 million in cost.

Mortenson was named to the position on Tuesday, with Skanska Hunt stepping away after having been on the project since late July. Also, the Oak View Group (OVG) developer and arena project team announced that world-renowned architectural firm Rockwell Group has been contracted to design the arena's suite and club levels — an addition expected to drive the final arena price tag up toward \$825 million and possibly \$850 million.

Project officials say the change will not impact the project's completion date and that all costs are being absorbed privately by OVG and its partners as per a deal with the City of Seattle. The Seattle Times first reported on Saturday that a general contractor change could be made.

"Mortenson's local Seattle office spent five months leading pre-construction efforts on the arena project and is very familiar with our approach and goals," Ken Johnsen, senior construction executive on the project, said in a release.

In the same release, Skanska executive vice-president Kevin McCain said: "Given the market challenges and shift in timing, it did not make sense for our joint venture to move forward to the next phase of the project, so we recently came to a mutually agreed upon decision to end our joint venture's involvement with the arena project."

Word that Skanska Hunt — a joint venture between Swedish construction giant Skanska and the AECOM Hunt architectural and engineering firm — was pulling away from the project has been circulating since a KeyArena groundbreaking ceremony held last Wednesday.

A political source said there had been friction between the company and OVG over project pricing, timeline, scope and repeated change orders. Skanska Hunt had been asked to sign a Guaranteed Maximum Price document, according to the source, but declined to do so.



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Initially estimated at just under \$600 million when OVG won a request for proposals bid in June 2017, the final price tag on the arena had spiraled to \$700 million by this past summer and then \$800 million last week when a National Hockey League franchise was awarded this city. In announcing the franchise, the NHL said it was pushing the team's launch date back 12 months to October 2021 so that an aggressive schedule for completing the arena could be met.

The NHL Seattle group had pushed for a start date of October 2020, but said it later became clear the new team would need to spend the first month of the 2020-21 season on the road because it was unlikely the venue would reopen before November of that year.

The renovation is to nearly double the arena's existing footprint to 750,000 square feet and create a 17,400-seat venue for hockey and 18,600 capacity for basketball. OVG is now targeting a spring 2021 opening, in time for the start of the WNBA Seattle Storm season.

While the cost of the arena keeps mounting, much of that is due to additional features being added by OVG and NHL Seattle. The addition of Rockwell Group as interior designer brings an additional — and pricey — level of sophistication the private developer is willing to pick up the tab on in addition to other soaring costs.

"Rockwell Group is the gold standard for designers," construction executive Johnsen said. "We are thrilled to make them a key part of our design team while they work toward a first class experience for our guests. Their engagement is a symbol of the high standards we have set to create the world's next great arena."

A Building Cost Index produced by Turner Construction says the price of building materials and skilled labor for nonresidential construction keeps climbing nationwide. The index says construction costs in the third quarter of 2018 are up 5.84 percent from the same period a year ago.

That would account for about a \$35 million increase on a project valued at \$600 million in late 2017.

U.S.-based Mortenson, which has a Kirkland office, has long been a leading global sports builder with more than 170 projects worldwide the past decade valued at \$11 billion. Recent projects include NFL stadiums in Las Vegas and Minneapolis and the Chase Center arena in San Francisco.

"We're already deep into the transition process and look forward to assisting Oak View Group with its building of a world class, landmark venue for our great city," Mortenson senior vice-president John Nowoj said in the joint news release. "Our company holds core to our mission: a commitment to excellence in economic inclusion and supplier diversity that will ensure we maximize the local impact and value of this tremendous project."

Seattle Times LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120658 Websites

The Athletic / Mock expansion draft: What the Seattle NHL team might look like in 2021

By Eric Duhatschek

Dec 11, 2018

First things first.

The assignment was to undertake a next-to-impossible task and project what a Seattle expansion team, selected in June of 2021, would look like

today, if every NHL team had filed its protected list this week for a 2021 selection.

But then we went for advice to George McPhee, architect of the Vegas Golden Knights, and suddenly, we didn't feel nearly as intimidated.

The primary reason: McPhee revealed that the Golden Knights began doing their own mock drafts in October 2016 and did the exercise monthly. From the time they began the process, through eight months of spirited dress rehearsals, their list changed constantly — until they got to June 2017, and actually made their 30 selections.

How many of those 30 players were on the list originally the previous October?

"About four," McPhee estimated.

So there, a necessary — and freeing — disclaimer, as we look into that faraway crystal ball and try to help Seattle, the NHL's 32nd team, select its expansion draft roster.

One thing you can be sure of — whoever assumes the helm in Seattle will study the Vegas model closely, given that the Golden Knights became the single most successful expansion franchise in the history of modern professional sport. And according to McPhee, mock drafts were a critical element in their preparation for the real thing.

"The value early on was twofold," McPhee said. "One is, you got familiar with the rules, because every time you went through the process, you had questions about how the rules would apply. After each mock draft, we had a list of questions that we took to the league to get some clarity. The other benefit was getting to know your staff — because we'd come together quickly and I didn't know some as well as others; I hadn't worked with many of them before. So that helped initially.

"Then, as we got further along the process, into January, February and March, it was then we had further clarity on which players we had actual interest in — because our scouts had been watching them for a while, and we just had a better idea of where players were going to land, and who would be protected and who wouldn't be."

Because Vegas was required to take a minimum number of players at each position (three in goal, nine on defence, and 14 up front), plus meet a minimum dollar value for the contracts, the selections were all interdependent upon one another.

"We did our mock drafts as if we were actually on the clock," said McPhee. "We tried to make it as realistic as possible — being mindful of the rules that were in place... There was just so much interplay in all of that, and that's what we were dealing with every time through — to make sure we were completely comfortable with how the process worked."

As Vegas conducted more and more mock drafts, it soon became clear to McPhee that some teams had greater protection issues than others, which helped him identify potential trading partners for all the pre-draft deals he made. McPhee ultimately landed extra assets in exchange for laying off certain players that teams didn't want to lose. A handful of those trades — primarily the ones made with Minnesota, Columbus, the Islanders and Florida — helped Vegas lay its strong initial foundation.

If McPhee were doing it all over again, would he do it the same way?

"Probably," he said. "I mean, you don't know for sure. We worked at it and worked at it and worked at it and we felt like we were ready. But you don't know until you get in there and then you get 72 hours to pull it off. When it was all done, there's not a lot of time to look back and reflect in this business, because we had to go right from submitting our list to the television show to flying to Chicago, amateur draft meetings, and then we were drafting players the next day.

"But I think we executed well."

McPhee, incidentally, expressed some sympathy for the exercise — of trying to pick a Seattle team 30 months out. He also reiterated a point that is often overlooked in published mock drafts: That Vegas had to



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absorb a minimum dollar value in contracts when making their choices, meaning you can't just pluck 30 players on entry-level contracts that might have an NHL upside because you wouldn't meet the contract spending threshold.

Two further ground rules and one observation before we get underway.

One, I follow the expansion draft criteria established by the NHL for Seattle, which is identical to the terms set for Vegas.

Two, selections were made below from the protected lists filed by colleagues in every NHL city, who crunched the roster numbers and came up with their best guesses as to what the teams they cover may end up doing. Separately, I'd done my own protected lists for each team and they didn't necessarily correspond – which is what you'd probably expect at this early stage in a hypothetical exercise. But hey, if Brent Burns and PK Subban and Brandon Montour are available, who am I to say no – even though I may say no to Burns because I'd rather take Evander Kane.

Three, Vegas selected three players they had zero interest in actually retaining – Connor Brickley from Carolina, Chris Thorburn from Winnipeg and JF Berube from the Islanders. All were gone nine days after the expansion draft selections were announced. We're guessing that for some teams – Ottawa notably comes to mind here – Seattle's selection will be someone they don't necessarily intend to keep, a pending UFA that they can simply walk away from.

So, having issued the necessary disclaimers, here is how Seattle might look, starting with my projected roster and three more from my colleagues at The Athletic:

If Seattle is trying to mimic Vegas's success out of the gate the decisions they make in terms of selecting their goaltenders will be pivotal to a quick start. They need their own Marc-André Fleury. Luckily for Seattle, they may have a number of goaltending options – though a lot will depend upon how the next generation of hot goalie prospects develops and evolves.

For example, if Ilya Samsonov has shown enough promise by then, chances are Washington will protect him ahead of Braden Holtby. Holtby might be the most attractive option among a number of expensive experienced goalies and would be just 31 at the time of the expansion draft (Fleury was 32). Jonathan Quick, by contrast, would be 35.

Ultimately, what you hope for in your goaltending on an expansion team is someone that can come in, play two-thirds of your games, and do so with the same sunny disposition that Fleury always demonstrated. A tall task to be sure, but goaltending is the one position where Seattle figures to have a number of intriguing, experienced options.

Three teams – Anaheim, Carolina and Calgary – figure to have legitimate protection problems in terms of the quality of the youth on their back end.

In fact, Anaheim is in exactly the same spot as before the Vegas expansion draft – trying to determine if they protect four (Cam Fowler, Hampus Lindholm, Josh Manson and Montour) and go with just four forwards – or protect seven forwards, three defencemen, lose Montour, but then retain 2015 Jacob Larsson, a first-round pick.

It's a similar situation in Carolina. Even if Justin Faulk has moved on by then, there's also Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce and Dougie Hamilton to protect, not to mention Fleury or Jake Bean. So, whoever falls through the cracks in Carolina will likely end up in Seattle. Calgary too will have four defencemen 25 or under playing for them by then.

Vegas also did well by landing a handful of quality journeymen defencemen (the likes of Colin Miller, Brayden McNabb, Nate Schmidt) and that's what Murray, Maatta and others would represent to Seattle.

Montreal will protect Shea Weber under our team-by-team model, but for argument's sake, let's explore the option of leaving him exposed as a means of moving out a contract a team may want to shed for salary-cap reasons, which was a prominent factor in the Vegas expansion success story.

Weber will turn 36 two months after the expansion draft. His contract is a monster – 14 years, \$110 million in total, and it will have five years to run from June 2021 on. And while the salary-cap hit won't change — \$7.857 million per season — the actual dollars in the contract do drop precipitously. Weber will earn \$6 million for the 2021-22 season, and then it drops to \$3 million for 2022-23 and then to \$1 million for the final three years of the contract.

Chances are, Weber might play through to 2023 and then look at retirement as an option at some point after that. But he's from Sicamous, B.C., and depending upon where Montreal ranks as a playoff contender in 2021, maybe there's a pull to play closer to home in the final years of his career.

It'll be a factor in what happens with Subban and Burns and maybe Mark Giordano of Calgary, too. At some point, it becomes a poker game, or a game of chicken – teams will potentially leave big-name players on big-dollar contracts exposed and then see what Seattle ultimately decides to do. They can grab a couple of those players – but not all of them.

Up front, the Seattle challenge will be to find the same sort of successful mix that Vegas managed – getting speed throughout the lineup, in order to play the up-tempo, push-push style, and enough scoring spread over two lines to create the sort of balance Vegas had. Is there a William Karlsson in the mix? Or a Jonathan Marchessault? It doesn't look like it right now.

Historically that's always been a challenge for expansion teams. Goaltending is usually available, along with reliable rearguards, and quality defensive forwards. Finding someone to put the puck in the net can be the greater challenge. So maybe, if you are Seattle and the choice in San Jose comes down to Burns or Evander Kane, maybe you opt for Kane. He'd still be two months shy of his 30th birthday in June 2021, and maybe Kane could do for Seattle what James Neal did for Vegas – score some goals in the first year of the team and then potentially become a trade chip moving forward.

Remember, that's what Neal and David Perron were supposed to be in the beginning for Vegas, players that could eventually be flipped for younger assets to teams looking for help in the short term. It didn't turn out that way because Vegas was an instant Stanley Cup contender. Instead of being traded at the deadline, they stayed around for the Stanley Cup push and then both left as unrestricted free agents.

Vegas improvised on the fly in its first season and that may be necessary in Seattle as well. Lots can – and presumably will – change in the 30 months before they are officially on the clock.

Scott Burnside

BURNSIDE: Guess what? There's a chance not one single player listed here ends up a Seattle Thingamabob. Don't care. Loved this process and given what happened in Vegas, love that we'll take another crack or 10 at it before the official list is actually submitted in June 2021. But as a first run through, how exciting to contemplate a chance to nab Norris Trophy winner P.K. Subban? Could happen. Nashville is going to have their hands full with all of their talent and exposing Subban and keeping Mattias Ekholm long-term may make more sense economically for the Predators.

Columbus (Markus Nutivaara or Ryan Murray?) may also have difficult defensive decisions, and a concentration of young defensive talent in Philadelphia may free up an experienced sniper like James van Riemsdyk. Anaheim, likewise, has lots of terrific youngsters coming and Seattle may end up with a cornerstone defender like Brandon Montour in the same way Vegas landed Shea Theodore.

Our friend Kevin Kurz in San Jose hypothesizes that another Norris winner, Brent Burns, could be exposed. Not room on our squad for both Subban and Burns at this stage so we'll stick with Subban but Burns, who will be 36 at the time of the expansion draft, would be a nice Plan B. And how about the possibility that, not unlike Vegas which ended up with franchise netminder Marc-André Fleury, the Washington Capitals are in a



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position to move away from Vezina Trophy winner Braden Holtby in favor of goaltender of the future Ilya Samsonov? Lots of folks will be pining for Holtby's teammate T.J. Oshie to end up in Seattle given his long connection to the community, but even though he may end up exposed his durability or lack thereof might be an issue.

So we acknowledge there might be one or two critics of our selection and specifically with our lack of obvious depth down the middle and up front in general. Don't care. That's exactly how we felt about Vegas. Turned out not to be a problem. And, along with a guy like van Riemsdyk and an aging Jeff Carter who we acknowledge may well get dealt out of L.A. before the expansion draft, somewhere among the Denis Malgins, Mark Jankowskis and Rasmus Asplunds there is our very own William Karlsson. Book it.

Craig Custance

CUSTANCE: In examining the way-too-early protected lists, there's going to be plenty of overpriced veterans on bad contracts for Seattle to choose from but my preference was to try and hit on as many younger players as possible in these selections. My hope is that big money in the form of Evander Kane, Jonathan Quick, PK Subban and Braden Holtby will help me hit the minimum salary requirements. There are probably a few AHL players on here but if a couple of these players flourish with new opportunity, it justifies the strategy. A player like Florida's Jayce Hawryluk fits that description. He's small (5-foot-11) but he has some pedigree as a second-round pick in 2014 and is lighting things up in Springfield this season, with 28 points in 24 games.

Gustav Lindstrom, on defense, also falls into that category. He's another second-round pick who some scouts compared to Anton Stralman when he was drafted. I'd take a young Anton Stralman on my team anytime. I'd look to spin Jonathan Quick in a trade if possible and would definitely be monitoring his health at that point in his career before selecting him. In general, the pool on defense was deeper than at forward, so that's how I'd built this team, with as many youngish defensemen as possible. And also Subban.

Jonathan Willis

WILLIS: The final roster won't look much like this, even in this imaginary scenario, because Seattle doesn't need 30 players but will certainly need prospects and draft picks for its long-term building plan. At least three of these forwards and three more defensemen are expendable in this process, and it makes sense for Seattle to be willing to take on some futures instead.

Primarily the goal here was to acquire players in their mid-20s in 2021. Twenty-five is usually regarded as prime age for a forward, with defensemen somewhere in that range as well, so ideally players would be 23-or-younger today. Eight forwards on the list above meet that description (four more are 24 or 25) and 11 of the 12 defensemen do as well.

The big exceptions are Phil Kessel and P.K. Subban, because they are Phil Kessel and P.K. Subban and sometimes talent trumps. Kessel owns a no-move clause and the expectation in Rob Rossi's piece is that he'll be traded prior to 2021, but since he was protected by no team in our exercise I felt he was fair game. Those two join a roster rich with good young players across all positions, with the possible exception of centre and in net.

Goal being a mess is ironic, because when Vegas made its picks, it had a ton of quality goalies to grab. However, goal is a hard position to project, and contracts tend to be shorter, so a lot of the expansion lists created by The Athletic's writing staff protected goalies of the future, rather than the current starter on those teams. I'd fully expect that Seattle has a richer field to choose from and makes better picks than I did above as a result.

The bottom line here is that this roster is a little light on current NHL talent (though it is better than I expected) but loaded with productive 20-

21- and 22-year-olds who should be well-positioned to contribute both in their Seattle debuts and in the years that follow.

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1120659 Websites

The Athletic / A lot of really good 2019 UFAs haven't signed extensions yet. Why that's rare and usually bad news for their team

By Sean McIndoe

Dec 11, 2018

One of the biggest stories of the NHL season is what's happening with the star-studded free agent class of 2019. And what's happening is: not much.

That's a big deal. Every summer, we look ahead to the following year's potential free agents and get excited over all the big names. And every year, almost all of those big names end up signing extensions long before they get anywhere near free agency. By the time July 1 rolls around, there's rarely much star power left.

But so far, that hasn't happened for most of the class of 2019. A few big names have signed, including Max Pacioretty, Pekka Rinne, Blake Wheeler and Ryan Ellis. But that's left several top stars who still need extensions, and who are now less than seven months away from hitting unrestricted free agency.

We can start with Erik Karlsson in San Jose, who could end up being one of the offseason's biggest stories for the second straight year. The Blue Jackets have both Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin. Buffalo's Jeff Skinner is having a career year. And the Senators have both Matt Duchene and Mark Stone.

Those six players would all figure to hit the jackpot if they made it to the open market. But the list goes on, with names like Wayne Simmonds, Jake Gardiner, Joe Pavelski, Jordan Eberle and Cam Talbot all on expiring deals. And then there's Anders Lee and Eric Staal and Tyler Myers and Mats Zuccarello and Semyon Varlamov and ... you get the picture. The list is stacked.

Karlsson is expected to use Drew Doughty's \$11-million cap hit as a starting point. Bobrovsky and Panarin could both be looking at deals that would carry cap hits north of \$9 or even \$10 million. Skinner won't be far behind, and Duchene was on track to get there too before his groin injury sidetracked a career year. Stone is in the same ballpark, although he can't officially sign an extension until Jan. 1. And many of those other names figure to be looking at cap hits that would at least start with a six or seven on a multi-year deal. That's a ton of talent, and a ton of potential money.

Hockey fans might be wondering whether it's unusual for this many big-name pending UFAs to make it this far into the season without an extension. The short answer: Yes, it's extremely unusual. For the longer answer, and what it might mean for 2019, let's dive into the recent history.

Most star players sign extensions relatively early. Some do it right on July 1, the first day they're eligible; we saw that this year with Doughty and Oliver Ekman-Larsson. Others take a few weeks, like Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane in 2014, or even make it past opening night, like Brent Burns last year. But by the time the calendar flips over to December, most of the big names are already locked down.



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When a pending UFA does make it this far into the season without an extension, there are basically three ways the situation can play out. The first is that they eventually sign during the season and stay with their team. If you're a fan of a team that has one of those big names above, that's the scenario you're looking for.

The second possibility is that the player doesn't sign during the season, but avoids free agency by agreeing to an extension during the offseason. In theory, that's just as good. But these cases often involve the player being traded first, either as a deadline rental or in one of those June deals that sees his rights dealt in exchange for a middling draft pick. It doesn't always work that way; as we'll see, there are players who've made it through the season without an extension and then re-upped with their team weeks before free agency, and if you're a contending team like the Sharks or Blue Jackets, maybe you're willing to roll the dice while you chase a Cup right now. But if you're the Senators or Flyers, can you take that chance?

And then there's the third option: The player doesn't sign during the season, they don't sign during the offseason and they make it to the free agency period. At that point they're free to shop their services to any team and the odds of them coming back are slim.

So how common is it for a star player to make it to December without an extension? And when it happens, how often do each of those three situations above play out?

TSN's Ian Mendes looked at the question from the Senators' angle yesterday. His conclusion was that the Senators are in uncharted territory as a franchise; they've never had a player make it this far into his final season and then sign the sort of max-length deal Duchene and Stone will be looking for. In fact, he found that it's extraordinarily rare for anyone to sign a max-length extension during the season once they've made it this close to hitting the open market. In recent years, only Anze Kopitar's eight-year, \$80-million deal from January 2016 fits the bill.

That's bad news for the Senators, not to mention the Blue Jackets, Sharks and others. But what if we cast our net a little bit wider, looking for deals that carried big cap hits but not necessarily max-length terms? Does the news get any better for teams trying to re-sign those pending UFA assets?

To find out, I went back and looked at the last five full seasons, dating back to 2013-14. That gives us all the seasons played under the current CBA that was signed in 2013. With some help from the fine folks at CapFriendly and their excellent signings database, I went looking for all the players in that five-year window who:

- were pending UFAs (not RFAs whose rights were still controlled by their team);
- made it to Dec. 1 without signing an extension; and
- went on to sign a contract that carried a cap hit worth at least 7.5 percent of that year's cap.

For this year, that 7.5 percent number would translate to just under \$6 million, which seems like a fair cutoff for a "big" contract. It might even be conservative, since most of the big names we mentioned above will blow past that figure easily.

So what do we find?

Not surprisingly, the 2013-14 season was kind of chaos. There was a brand new CBA, the cap had just gone down instead of up and compliance buyouts had rippled through the market. Teams were still feeling their way through the new landscape and lots of big names went into the 2013-14 season without extensions. Over 20 players who were still unsigned by Dec. 1 ultimately got contracts for more than that 7.5 percent cutoff of just over \$4.8 million. That includes some guys who signed during the season (like Henrik Lundqvist, Dion Phaneuf, Patrick Marleau, Joe Thornton), some who were traded first (Ryan Callahan, Marian Gaborik, Andrew MacDonald) and quite a few who made it to July 1 (Jarome Iginla, Paul Stastny, Thomas Vanek, Ryan Miller).

All in all, 2013-14 was a pretty crazy year. It was also the last of its kind, at least until this season. Things were about to change radically.

In 2014-15, only six pending UFAs made it to December without an extension before ultimately meeting our definition of a big contract (which thanks to a rising cap is now a \$5.175 million hit.) Five of the six were defensemen, and none were necessarily what you'd consider major stars. Nick Foligno re-signed in Columbus in December, Marc Staal re-signed with the Rangers in January and Johnny Boychuk re-signed with the Islanders in March. Jeff Petry was traded from Edmonton to Montreal, where he signed in June. And Andrej Sekera and Mike Green made it to free agency.

That was it. With some time to adjust to the new CBA, teams were locking down their UFAs well in advance.

The 2015-16 season saw a bigger group; there were 10 players who ultimately hit the 7.5 percent threshold of \$5.35 million after being still unsigned into December. And three of those were legitimately big stars: Steven Stamkos, Dustin Byfuglien and Kopitar. None of those three ended up switching teams; Kopitar signed in January, Byfuglien followed with a five-year deal in February and Stamkos made it all the way to the UFA interview window before returning to the Lightning.

Other players did switch teams before cashing in, with Alex Goligowski and Keith Yandle having their rights traded in the offseason and names like Milan Lucic, Andrew Ladd, David Backes and Kyle Okposo making it to July 1. But the three big stars stayed put. If you're a fan of a team with a big-name pending UFA you want to see them keep, this is the year you're hanging your hopes on.

But if so, you may want to stop reading now, because the news gets a lot worse in both 2016-17 and 2017-18. In the last two years, no player who made it Dec. 1 without an extension has signed a "big" contract during the season. Not one.

Some have come close, and maybe you could argue that guys like Jonathan Marchessault or Josh Bailey should count as stars even though they each came in about half-a-million under our 7.5 percent threshold. Interestingly, two big names did eventually re-sign with their teams in the offseason, and it was the same team both times. The Capitals waited out T.J. Oshie in 2017 and John Carlson this year. That makes sense, since the Caps were Cup contenders both years and were willing to risk losing a player in UFA to keep the roster together.

But the only other unsigned star to get a new deal before July 1 was Evander Kane earlier this year, and he was traded from Buffalo to San Jose before it happened. Seven others, including James van Riemsdyk, Alex Radulov, Kevin Shattenkirk and James Neal, reached free agency and switched teams as UFAs. Only Joe Thornton made it that far and then stayed put.

To drive the point home, here's another way to look at it: From the moment Byfuglien signed his extension in February 2016, we've had 19 players that made it to December without an extension and eventually signed what we'd call a big contract, and all but four of those players switched teams in the process. And not one of them re-signed while the season was still going on.

We're admittedly getting into some arbitrary cutoffs here, but it illustrates the trend. If you're a star player whose next contract is going to be a big one and you make it to December without an extension, your odds of staying on your current team aren't good. And even if you do re-sign, it probably won't happen until the offseason.

OK, great. That was a lot of names and a lot of dollars. But what does it all mean for all these potential UFAs right now?

One possible answer is that it doesn't mean anything. Maybe five years and a few dozen players just isn't enough of a sample size to work with. Maybe that 7.5 percent cutoff was the wrong one to use. Maybe we're seeing a side effect of the bigger deals that RFAs have been getting. Or maybe front office philosophies can shift so quickly in today's NHL that trying to spot a trend is futile.



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But it's hard not to look at what's happening this year and jump to another conclusion, and I'm guessing that some of you are already ahead of me here. Recent history tells us that star players almost always prefer to sign extensions at the earliest opportunity, and yet here we have a cohort of big names that are all heading toward the new year without a deal in place. We haven't seen anything like this since that first season of the new CBA, five years ago, and even that year couldn't come close to this season's star power. What happened? Did something change?

Yes, something did, and it goes back to one of those unsigned players from 2017-18 we haven't mentioned yet. We need to talk about the John Tavares Effect.

Until Tavares came along, we knew one thing about NHL free agency: Franchise players didn't move. Sure, good players did, even stars. Guys like Lucic or Shattenkirk or Stastny could make it to July 1 and hit the jackpot on a new team. But not the really elite guys. If you were a Kopitar or Toews or Doughty or Carey Price-level star, your team backed up the Brinks truck, you got your deal and you stayed put. When Stamkos tip-toed all the way up to free agency and then backed off, it just confirmed what we already knew. Franchise players didn't do UFA.

But then Tavares came along and blew up the paradigm. He actually did it, getting to July 1. And then he did the unthinkable and switched teams, making a fortune in the process.

It's at least possible that Tavares was the game-changer. Suddenly, you can't tell a guy like Panarin or Karlsson or Stone that they have to grab their money while they can, or that reaching UFA is only a last resort. They've just seen it work for another player. (The fact that Tavares' first two months in Toronto have been a major success probably doesn't hurt.)

So maybe the market really has shifted. Back in 2005, when that CBA drastically lowered the age of free agency, many of us assumed we'd see the dawn of MLB-style offseason bidding wars for in-their-prime stars. But it never really happened. Maybe it is now. And that could be very bad news for teams like Columbus, Ottawa and San Jose, and for their fans.

It's not all doom and gloom. Blue Jackets fans will want us to point out that Panarin and Bobrovsky both signed big mid-season extensions when they were still RFAs, so we know they're at least willing to negotiate during the year. A few of the current crop of pending UFAs will almost have to get deals done during the season, since there's only going to be so much money available next summer and not everyone will want to take their chances on competing for it. And now that we know that the cap is on the way up to \$83 million or so, maybe some teams feel more willing to loosen the purse strings and make sure they keep their core together.

But if you're a fan of one of the many teams with a big-name pending UFA, you'd better hope so. Because time is running out. And if recent history is any guide, your odds of seeing that star player stay put are slim and getting slimmer.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.12.2018

1120660 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs, Nylander regain composure in win over Hurricanes

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

December 11, 2018, 9:34 PM

RALEIGH, N.C. — No stone is left unturned in the Toronto Maple Leafs efforts to maximize player performance. That's why William Nylander has found no internal pressure to perform at a high-end level since returning from his long contract impasse.

By the best estimates of the Leafs sports science department, it typically takes a player 12 days after training camp before his heart rate levels out during exertion.

That would put Nylander on schedule to be functioning at his peak sometime in mid-January after hitting the ground running last week and so far playing more games (three) than he's had full practices (two) with the Leafs.

Given the timeframe involved, Tuesday's 4-1 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes should be seen as a big step forward for the Swedish winger. These are still early days and he made a noticeable impact at PNC Arena, getting rewarded with two assists.

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The second came on a play where his offensive gifts were on full display, with Nylander protecting the puck while coming in on a 2-on-1 before feathering a perfect pass to Patrick Marleau only once defenceman Calvin de Haan lunged at him in a futile effort to break up the play.

"I just saw that [Marleau] was driving the far post," said Nylander. "I didn't really have anything to shoot at, I felt like, so I just wanted to pass it to him."

It was a reminder of why the Leafs were enticed to reach a little beyond their comfort zone in order to get him signed minutes before the Dec. 1 deadline that would have ruled him out for the season.

It also underscored why the Hurricanes and several other teams tried to pry him away from the Leafs in a trade when contract negotiations stalled.

Even at something less than 100 per cent, Nylander has the kind of undeniable offensive talent that helps produce victories. On Tuesday he played alongside Marleau and Nazem Kadri, and they controlled play against Carolina's third line of Micheal Ferland, Clark Bishop and Brock McGinn during a dominant first period.

The matchup shifted when Ferland was lost to an upper-body injury, but Nylander still finished the night with Toronto controlling 61 per cent of the even-strength shot attempts while he was on the ice.

There were a few spotty moments, too, including six shifts that extended beyond a minute. That'll make the legs burn at the best of times, let alone when you're just getting up and running after seven-plus months between games.

One of those shifts saw Nylander desperately wrap his arms around Lucas Wallmark in the defensive zone before keeling over his stick and gasping for air when the play was stopped to give him a minor penalty for holding.

But in Mike Babcock he has found an understanding ally. Nylander's night also included a double-minor for an accidental high-stick, which the Leafs killed off successfully, and yet the head coach had no trouble seeing the big picture when assessing his performance.

"It's going to take him time, though. Let's not get carried away," said Babcock. "They're all fine as long as the ice is open, but as soon as it's in contact and you've got to keep your legs going, you get stuck out on a shift.

"He took a penalty the one time he got stuck out on a shift. It's hard for you. It's going to take some time. So we'll be patient, he has to be [too]."

Back under the care of the Leafs, Nylander is doing everything he can to fast-track the process. He skated regularly with AIK's under-20 team in



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Stockholm while contract negotiations dragged on, but there was no way to mimic the kind of pace he's seen since returning to the NHL.

He skated twice with assistant coach D.J. Smith when he first got back to Toronto and has been doing extra work every day since. On Tuesday morning, when only the Leafs scratches and depth players participated in an optional skate, Nylander was out on the ice, too, trying to improve his conditioning.

"It takes time," said teammate Morgan Rielly, who scored his career-best 10th of the season against Carolina. "He didn't have a training camp, he played no pre-season games and he's playing against guys that are in mid-season form. It's a tough situation to come in to, but he's done a great job.

"He's worked very hard and he's happy to be back and we're happy to have him back."

"I'm sure he's going to feel more comfortable as we go on," added goalie Frederik Andersen. "Keep pushing it."

While it's a little early to read too much into Nylander's deployment, you can see the benefit his depth brings to the Leafs lineup. The Marleau-Kadri-Nylander line has controlled 73 per cent of shot attempts in a little more than 23 minutes together so far, an advantage built on the fact opposing teams tend to put their best checkers on the Auston Matthews and John Tavares units.

Having a player as talented as Nylander on the third line is not a luxury many other NHL teams have. Now just imagine when he gets up to full speed.

"Every game is getting better and better," he said.

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Oilers looking as good as they have in a long while

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

December 12, 2018, 12:46 AM

Well, they always say a hockey player is at his best when he's playing guilty. How about a hockey organization?

On the day that the topic du jour in Edmonton was Andrew Ference's organizational rip job, complete with charges that the team partied too much to have any success when Ference was their captain, the current edition of the team played clear-headed and to the point, spanking the Colorado Avalanche 6-4 in Denver. This one wasn't as close as it sounds, as the Oilers twice led by four before a couple of late Avs tallies.

All of the sudden, instead of seeing glaring weaknesses in this Oilers team, some strengths are beginning to show. It starts in goal, where Mikko Koskinen was once again magnificent — not allowing a Colorado goal until the Oilers had a 4-0 lead — and that confidence radiated from the crease outwards.

This team is defending as a five-man unit better than it has in a long time, definitely a Ken Hitchcock trait, and now it's starting to get the support scoring required to get to three or four goals. In its past three games Edmonton sandwiched seven- and six-goal efforts around that 1-0 win over Calgary, proving it can win either way.

The Oilers pulled into the top wild-card spot Tuesday and are two points out of second in the Pacific, with games in hand. They're right where you need to be with Christmas approaching — playing well and right with the pack.

Other than the numbskull Colorado fan who bloodied his hand while breaking the penalty box glass, and the crucial loss of Oscar Klefbom seemingly long-term with a hand injury, this was a night of smart, opportunistic hockey.

Here's how we saw it:

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Koskinen can't play any better than he did in the first 35 minutes. The Nathan MacKinnon line was bringing it, and with 25 minutes of hockey left to play the score was 4-0 Edmonton — despite 24 shots on goal for Colorado to that point. It could have been 4-4, but with Semyon Varlamov getting the hook Tuesday, there's no doubt which team had the better netminder.

When Koskinen first arrived from the KHL this fall, his glove was like a bad motel. Pucks went in there, but never stayed for long. He was leaving rebounds all over the place, and his ability to get to shoot-ins behind the net was also suspect.

As he's become comfortable to the North American game, so too has his glove security improved. So, he's catching pucks he's supposed to catch, and a few he shouldn't. The rest of the time he's playing an economical style, getting behind his net to stop pucks better than he did in October, and giving his club a chance to win every night.

Klefbom out "weeks"

This injury is really going to hurt.

Klefbom's left hand was gripping his stick when struck by a slapshot, and Hitchcock intimated after the game that the injury was serious, which sounds to us like a broken bone. They sent Klefbom home to Edmonton while the team heads to Winnipeg, and "he's going to be out weeks, not days," Hitchcock said post-game.

That's crushing to a team that's light on high-end defencemen with an offensive bent. Klefbom ranked fourth in the NHL, averaging 25:54 of ice time per night — a huge whack of time to spread out around the rest of this group.

Darnell Nurse took his spot atop the No. 1 power-play unit and scored a goal Tuesday. He'll see his 22:05 per night extended, to be sure.

When you get two lines like this going head to head, it's not surprising they pumped home 10 goals.

The Colorado super-line of MacKinnon (0-2-2), Mikko Rantanen (2-2-4) and Gabriel Landeskog (2-2-4) accounted for 10 points, scoring three of the four Colorado goals. The Oilers top line — Connor McDavid (1-1-2), Leon Draisaitl (1-2-3) and Alex Chiasson (scoreless) — had half as many points, with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins chipping in two goals and an assist off the second line.

The two top units ran the show, with neither team walking out of the rink claiming to have defended either unit very well. It's what fans pay to see, though the decisive factor was likely Nugent-Hopkins' production, as well as goals by Kyle Brodziak and Nurse.

If the top lines are a wash, then the support scoring wins the day.

The story in Edmonton on Tuesday was Ference's carve-job on the Oilers of 2013-15, of which only Nugent-Hopkins, Klefbom, Draisaitl and Nurse (played just two games) remain on the Edmonton roster.



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Ference appeared on Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek's "31 Thoughts" podcast, where he said the team he captained was not committed to winning.

"You had a group of players that talked about how they wanted to make the playoffs, and talked about how sick they were of losing," Ference said. "And then by Game 3, after losing 6-1, they're straight out to the bar till three in the morning, lighting up the night life scene in Edmonton. Like, come on, give me a break."

Nugent-Hopkins, who had a two-goal night, spoke to the Edmonton Journal at Tuesday's morning skate.

"I'm a little surprised that he would come out now and say these things. It's strange. I always got along with him, too," said RNH. "To say that guys were going out all the time and were showing up hungover, I don't remember guys doing that at all."

"I don't know about that. Guys had every intention of working hard and getting better. Guys tried."

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Josh Leivo's strong start with Canucks continues

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

December 11, 2018, 11:45 PM

The slippery slope that eventually led the Canucks over a cliff in November began with a game in Buffalo in which Vancouver blew a two-goal lead in the final two-and-a-half minutes of regulation time and lost 4-3 to the Sabres in a shootout.

The 1-10-2 fall that followed did not kill the Canucks, but they've got a long way to climb. Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets, 31 days after they lost their footing in Buffalo, the Canucks worked their way towards more solid ground by scoring twice in the last three minutes to win 3-2.

The Canucks are suddenly on a three-game winning streak and look again like the resilient, resourceful team that surprised everyone by starting 10-6-1.

They weren't as good in Columbus as they were in Sunday's 6-1 win in St. Louis or last Thursday's 5-3 win at home against the Nashville Predators.

But they soldiered through their poor stretches against the Blue Jackets without falling behind by more than one goal, and were able to surge in the third when they needed to.

From an acute angle, Jake Virtanen banked a shot short-side off Blue Jackets goalie Joonas Korpisalo to win it for Vancouver with 1:46 remaining. Josh Leivo's deflection off linemate Elias Pettersson's foot had tied it 2-2 just 78 seconds earlier.

Goalie Jacob Markstrom made 34 saves for the Canucks and kept his team in it during the second period when Vancouver was outshot 17-7.

Climbing back towards the Western Conference playoff race, the Canucks will try to extend their win streak to a season-high four games Thursday in Nashville.

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After Josh Leivo's first week with the Canucks, it's hard to fathom on the West Coast how the Toronto Maple Leafs let the forward go for next to nothing in last week's trade for second-tier minor-leaguer Michael Carcone.

The trade and Leivo's immediate impact no doubt reflect the Maple Leafs' mighty lineup strength and the Canucks' desperation. But Leivo's goal and assist on Tuesday, as well as his comfort with an ongoing deployment alongside super rookie Pettersson, are an early validation of the Canucks' belief that the 25-year-old has the skill to play higher than the fourth line.

What's been really impressive about Leivo is his hockey IQ. He obviously has learned a lot about the game during his five-and-a-half years as a professional, most of it in the minors, and was well-coached in Toronto by Mike Babcock. Leivo does a lot of things well.

The former third-round draft pick is big enough (6-foot-2) to get to the net, fast enough to keep up to Pettersson and skilled enough to contribute. In four games with the Canucks, he has two goals and an assist and, including his final week as a Leaf, has four goals in his last eight games.

We're pretty sure he's not actually going to turn into a 40-goal scorer in the NHL. But we're dead certain he has helped the Canucks get better.

There was probably a lot of spilled beer around Vancouver when Jake Virtanen – "Shotgun Jake" to anyone who spends much time on social media – scored the winner about 10 minutes after it looked initially like he might have scored the Canucks' first goal, too. That one, however, was Leivo's.

With 10 goals in 33 games, the 22-year-old Virtanen has equalled his output from all of last season. The powerful winger finished with 17:36 of ice time, four shots on net, two hits and one block.

A lot of credit for his development goes to coach Travis Green, who started Virtanen's makeover as a pro two years ago during their season together with the Utica Comets. But the progress this year is all about Virtanen.

He has taken what he has learned about consistency and intensity to make himself better. But there's also a natural maturation occurring, too.

Virtanen understands the game better and also understands himself better, and it's this self-awareness that has really helped him. He still needs to train better in the summer and bring his A-game more often. He can't for a second get complacent about his place in the NHL.

But he sure looks like he's going to turn into a good pro, albeit not a spectacular one, who could help the Canucks for years. No one could have reasonably projected that at the start of last season.

The best thing about Chris Tanev's season is that he has been reasonably healthy, missing only five of 33 games so far after bruising his hip on Oct. 24. But the shutdown defencemen hasn't been the defensive titan he was in recent years when he was healthy.

He still gets all the toughest assignments and makes a lot of good plays and remains one of the bravest and most prolific shot-blockers in the NHL. But his even-strength shots-for percentage of 41.3 is among the lowest on the Canucks and more than six points lower than last season's.

Tuesday, however, might have been his best game of the year. He set up Leivo's redirection that tied it 1-1 at 8:11 of the third period and was on the ice for both of the Canucks' goals at the end. Tanev also dived in front of Pierre-Luc Dubois' shot with 45 seconds remaining after a bad giveaway by Antoine Roussel. And on a night when Vancouver was outshot 36-25, the Canucks controlled 61.8 per cent of shot attempts during Tanev's 19:45 of even-strength play.



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So, the Canucks' first goal was a redirect off a Columbus defenceman, the second a bounce-in off Pettersson's toe, and the third a bank shot by Virtanen through a puck-sized hole that Korpisalo left at his near post.

Were the Canucks lucky to win? Yes. And no.

More than a couple of pucks bounced into Vancouver's net during its 1-10-2 slide and at least that many bounced against them in the offensive zone. Remember the Michael Del Zotto shot that went post-crossbar-post in a 2-1 loss to the New York Rangers on Nov. 12?

Most luck evens out in the long run. It helps immensely if you make your own luck, too.

Didn't like seeing Columbus power forward Josh Anderson leave the game after being run into the post in the second period. But loved how Vancouver defenceman Ben Hutton didn't flinch in forcefully cutting off his path when the Blue Jacket had a step on the Canuck and was taking the puck hard to the net.

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Sportsnet.ca / 6 NHLers under the most pressure to salvage their seasons

Sonny Sachdeva | @sachdevasonny

December 11, 2018, 2:53 PM

Even the best of the big leaguers will stumble through a slow start here and there over the course of a career.

There are many contextual factors that can weigh into an NHLer's early-season performance, but in a league that has as much parity as this one, where even the worst of the 31 teams can be a stiff test on any given night, an early individual slide can only be forgiven for so long.

Which brings us here. With the first third of the season in the books, we've reached the point where the don't-worry-it's-going-to-come slow starters are flirting with this-season's-a-write-off territory, whether due to a lack of production or other unusual circumstances.

That being the case, let's take a look at a few names in need of a strong string of performances to salvage their 2018-19 campaigns:

You had to know he would be in the mix. File this under the 'Unusual Circumstances' mentioned above (and then 'Understatement of the Year' while you're at it).

The talented Swede is only on his way to game No. 3 as mid-December approaches after wrapping up the prolonged contract negotiations that had Leafs faithful on edge through October and November. The work is just beginning to now live up to his hefty new contract in the fishbowl of the Toronto hockey market, where each miss-step will be under the microscope.

There's bound to be some rust on Nylander's wheels — his first two games proved as much:

"Any time you've missed that amount of hockey, it's going to be hard for him," head coach Mike Babcock told Sportsnet's Chris Johnston following Nylander's first game back. "But I talked to [Matthews] about that, too. They're both going to have to do extra. We're going to do it every practice day and they'll crawl their way back to being the players they're capable of being."

Given his skill-set, it's fair to assume Nylander will be just fine and that he'll get something out of 2018-19 after all. But if not, here's betting it won't fly under the radar.

It's been a tumultuous year for the Montreal Canadiens, but the club has withstood key injuries and roster shake-ups to keep themselves in the playoff picture. With a couple unexpected stars rolling in Max Domi and Tomas Tatar, the Canadiens appear to be in better shape than originally thought.

Except, in a cruel twist, the one name on the roster that's supposed to evoke the least doubt is the one enduring the lion's share of troubles.

Through 23 starts in 2018-19, Carey Price has put together some truly underwhelming numbers — his .902 save percentage and 2.92 goals-against average nearly the worst in his career. The only worse campaign? Last season: .900 save percentage, 3.11 goals-against average through 49 appearances.

Writing Price off or assuming this slide is a sign of a genuinely diminishing skill-set is foolish given all he's accomplished. But, regardless, there's no denying he needs to right the ship as soon as possible to avoid being the issue for a team that's showed promise. That his \$10.5-million cap hit is the highest on the team makes that fact even more pointed.

In his past six starts, Price has allowed more than two goals just once and has a .920 save percentage over that time. His last start, a 37-save win over Chicago, was the best of them all and could signal he's on the path back to his rightful level.

"When you think about how much time Price spent chasing around the puck with his eyes — Chicago played close to 15 minutes on the power play and had the puck in Montreal's end for the majority of it — it really hammers home what kind of performance he authored," Sportsnet's Eric Engels wrote of the 2015 Hart Trophy winner's standout showing. "He was world class in this one."

Speaking of crucially important Montreal returns, the Canadiens have their captain back in the fold with Shea Weber having slotted back in for his club's past six games.

Much like Nylander, Weber's need for a strong performance over the latter two thirds of 2018-19 rests more on the fact of his late start than a slow one. Elements of the club's offensive game have looked promising, but Weber will need to carry the team's blue line for things to truly roll along as they have been — especially with the Canadien mentioned above facing his own issues.

Montreal's captain has started strong, putting up five points through his first six appearances. And good thing, because nothing less will be expected or accepted from the Sicamous, B.C., native. That simply comes with the territory, given the gargantuan dollars Weber is raking in for the foreseeable future (\$7.86 million annually through 2025-26) and what the organization gave up to bring him to town.

"I think it's going to keep getting better as we go here [and I] get more comfortable being in those game situations," Weber told Engels after his first game back in the lineup. "Obviously practice is different and being in those actual situations when you have to read and react and things are happening quickly will be good to go along and get better as we go."

Trade counterpart P.K. Subban flirted with career-best territory last year as Weber was limited to just 26 games in a Canadiens sweater. The pressure is on for the latter to continue re-asserting his dominance on the ice to win back the Montreal faithful and ward off the growing crowd of doubters.

Three years with a \$6.25-million cap hit was always going to be an ambitious, likely overly optimistic number for Ilya Kovalchuk. But there was certainly reason to believe the 35-year-old could step back into the NHL and inflict his scoring prowess upon the opposition once again.

It's not that he hasn't been able to do that at times. The former Thrasher and Devil started strong with 14 points in 14 games, pacing his club for



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much of the early going. But, simultaneously, the opposition has potted 3.4 goals per 60 minutes when Kovalchuk is on the ice at even-strength (per Hockey-Reference), the highest mark for any Kings forward who has skated in as many games this season as the talented Russian.

That landed him in new coach Willie Desjardins' doghouse and, by extension, in the bottom six — recently hacking Kovalchuk's early-season 20-plus-minutes of ice time down to as low as 6:20. It also brought an 11-game pointless streak after that early glut of scoring.

Pushed out of the lineup by an ankle injury that's moved Kovalchuk to the IR for the next month, his path back to top-six relevancy isn't going to get any easier. But Los Angeles still has two-and-a-half seasons of No. 17 on its roster, so burying him on the fourth line when he does return isn't going to do much to help the near-last-place club's cause.

Either way, it seems if Kovalchuk can't shore up his two-way game well enough to win back some better offensive opportunities, his much-hyped NHL return could wind up finishing a very inglorious affair.

For a time during the off-season, the Calgary Flames' inking of James Neal looked like it could wind up being one of the summer's better moves. Here was one of the game's most consistently dangerous snipers — with 20-plus goals in every season of his career, topping out at 40 with the high-flying 2011-12 Penguins — joining an Albertan squad sorely lacking offensive depth.

Two months into the campaign, everything looks peachy for Calgary. A dominant and deep offence has them sitting with the fifth-most goals per game in the league and the third-best goal differential — all of which has added up to a conference-topping performance.

Unfortunately, Neal's played almost no part in that.

Stashed on the third line early on, with little opportunity to move up in the lineup, Neal's averaging the fewest minutes of his career at 15:24 per night. Unsurprisingly, that's plummeted his points-per-game and goals-per-game pace as he's put up just three goals and six points through 31 games. Which is the cause and which is the result is unclear at the moment, and likely will remain so unless a longer look comes his way.

A return to the Neal of old, bringing an all-world shot and a healthy dose of goals at even strength, could be the factor that tips the Flames from the hot-starter category to genuine contender. But the 31-year-old continuing on anywhere near the pace he's currently showcasing could make that \$5.75 million in each of the next four years look mighty wasteful.

Alex Galchenyuk's been the poster boy for misused assets so far in his career, with many feeling he never got a fair shot in Montreal, despite having showed a 30-goal effort and plenty of promise. A trade out of the Canadiens' old-school tradition and into the Coyotes' new-school mentality was supposed to offer up a much-needed second chance.

But so far, Galchenyuk hasn't done much to dissuade his doubters. An early-season injury that kept him out for much of October did him no favours, but in the 21 games since, the 24-year-old has put up just three goals and 11 points. That leaves his points-per-game and goals-per-game scoring paces among career lows at the moment.

He's been given talent to help him thrive, with marquee Coyotes star Clayton Keller skating alongside Galchenyuk, as well as recently-acquired Nick Schmaltz. And an early stretch of eight points through eight games showed some promise, before a less-inspiring three-in-12 stretch doused that progress.

There's plenty of time for the former Canadien to find his way, but the nature of his arrival in Arizona makes his 2018-19 season performance all the more worthy of scrutiny. Domi is off to a career-best start after going the other way in the Montreal-Arizona swap, flipping the script after the original reaction to the one-for-one trade had many struggling to understand how a 30-goal sniper like Galchenyuk could be flipped for someone like Domi, who had only 36 goals to his name over his entire career.

And there's the matter of his polarizing positional inconsistency. Said Coyotes GM John Chayka after the trade for Galchenyuk: "Our thesis on it is he has the ability (to play centre) and we think that he has natural tendencies that lend itself to that. ... He's had success playing the centre position. I don't think we'd make this trade if we didn't think he had the ability to play centre."

After centring Schmaltz and Keller for a stretch, Galchenyuk was bumped to the wing at the end of November, with Schmaltz taking over centre duties.

Pressure's on.

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Sportsnet.ca / Cap comparables: Why Auston Matthews could make more than Connor McDavid

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen

December 11, 2018, 11:27 AM

We know this summer's crop of impending restricted free agents (RFAs) is loaded with high-end talent. But with the salary cap expected to rise to \$83 million next season, any attempt to project how much each of these players might be seeking from their next contract must take the following into account.

Each year the cap rises, attempts to directly compare average annual values (AAVs) signed in prior seasons becomes less relevant. For example: how did William Nylander, a 60-point player, sign for a higher AAV than David Pastrnak, who scored 70 points in his contract year? Well, it's simple: the cap went up and, as a result, Nylander's \$6.9 million AAV, while greater than Pastrnak's \$6.6 million, represents a smaller percentage against the cap at the time of signing.

This is why it's important to look at 'cap comparables' from the perspective of what the percentage of an AAV is at the time of each signing.

With that in mind, and to help us potentially gauge what this epic crop of RFAs might be signing for, here's a look at some recent big signings through the prism of their percentages against the cap, and which players from the 2019 RFA class might be seeking a similar slice of the \$83 million pie.

To keep things as simple as possible, we're only comparing players coming off their entry-level contracts (ELC) rather than also lumping in those who signed bridge deals first, with one key exception below. The only caveat is we can't know which players are open to taking less to fit in, or who will get a bridge deal rather than locking in long-term. The teams, too, will surely rather compare to past AAVs.

Contract Comparable No. 1: Connor's McDavid's 16.6 cap percentage

Potential 2019 RFA comparables: Auston Matthews, Patrik Laine

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap	
Connor McDavid	2017	16.7	\$12.5 million		\$75 million
RFAs	2019	16.7	\$13.9 million	\$83 million	

Just two men are playing on a contract with an AAV more than 16 per cent of the cap at the time of the deal: Alex Ovechkin (16.8) and Connor



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McDavid (16.7). But given that Ovechkin's 13-year contract term is no longer an option, McDavid is effectively the torch-bearer, and rightfully so. And since McDavid owns a pair of Art Rosses, Ted Lindsays and a Hart Trophy, let's assume no one will sign a deal topping his percentage.

In terms of 2019 RFAs, if Auston Matthews doesn't take a major discount, it's likely he'll come in at a higher cap percentage than Jack Eichel (13.3 per cent) but less than McDavid's.

And this is where it gets interesting. Should Matthews sign for, say, a cap percentage of 15 per cent, that would give him an AAV of \$12.5 million, the same as McDavid's.

That is why it's completely reasonable to suspect, if not expect, that Matthews could end up with the same cap hit — or possibly even a little bit more — than McDavid's current league-high mark.

The only reason Laine is listed as a potential fit in this range is because of Ovechkin. Given his elite scoring abilities, Laine is a unique player without any other obvious comparable. Complicating matters is the fact that Laine is a winger, and wingers aren't perceived to be as valuable as centres such as Matthews or McDavid.

Contract Comparable No. 2: Jack Eichel's 13.3 cap percentage

Possible comparables: Mitch Marner, Mikko Rantanen, Patrik Laine, Brayden Point

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap
Jack Eichel	2017	13.3	\$10 million	\$75 million
RFAs	2019	13.3	\$11 million	\$83 million

When it comes to Marner's next deal, some have used Eichel's \$10 million AAV as a potential comparable. And perhaps Laine falls in this category too, though being the generational sniper he is, there is a strong argument to be made that he should earn more than Marner. And could this also be where Rantanen, the league's leading scorer, lands as well?

This group is again headlined by a centre as the primary comparable. And while signing an extension in this range would make Brayden Point the highest-paid member of the Tampa Bay Lightning, he is the second-best centre in this RFA class next to Matthews and is producing at a level that would put him in line for a major pay day. Point's 21 goals are one off the league lead and 12 of them have come at even strength.

Will Point be willing to sign for a hometown discount like Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov? That's a very real factor here and it would knock his AAV down another tier.

A winger has yet to sign for anything in this range coming off their ELC so it will be fascinating to see if any of the high-level wingers listed above can break the mould this summer.

Since the start of last season, only five players own higher points per game averages than Rantanen's 1.19: Nathan MacKinnon, Connor McDavid, Nikita Kucherov, Claude Giroux and Evgeni Malkin. That's it. Marner is averaging 0.98 points per game over that stretch, just behind Eichel's 1.02.

Contract Comparable No. 3: Nikita Kucherov's 11.95 cap percentage

Possible comparables: Mitch Marner, Mikko Rantanen

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap
Nikita Kucherov	2018	11.95	\$9.5 million	\$79.5 million
RFAs	2019	11.95	\$9.9 million	\$83 million

Throwing a wrench into all of this is Kucherov. He's the only contract on this list that wasn't signed off an ELC — the \$9.5 million cap hit he'll start next season with was signed coming off a three-year bridge deal. The reason we're including him, however, is because it's hard to make a case

why any of these wingers should get more than someone with Kucherov's resume.

With an 85-point season followed by a 100-point season and now challenging for the scoring lead again, Kucherov surely could have gotten more if he pressed the issue. Anyone signing for the same percentage Kucherov did the day he signed would be getting approximately \$9.9 million against an \$83 million cap.

Because Kucherov is a.) the first winger to appear here and b.) a top-three scorer in the league over the past two seasons, this may be the best upper-limit comparable for the top wingers in next summer's RFA market. Rantanen certainly could be in this bracket if he challenges for the Art Ross — but then where do you rank Marner against Rantanen?

If it's tough to swallow either of those wingers making as much as Kucherov relative to the salary cap, the lowest they may fall is to the next tier.

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.

Contract Comparable No. 4: Taylor Hall's 10.0 cap percentage

Possible comparables: Brock Boeser, Sebastian Aho, Kyle Connor, Mitch Marner, Mikko Rantanen

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap
Taylor Hall	2012	10	\$6 million	\$60 million
RFAs	2019	10	\$8.3 million	\$83 million

Outside of Ovechkin and his 13-year deal, Taylor Hall is the high-water mark for left wingers coming off an entry-level contract. For right wingers, the pace-setter coming off an ELC is Vladimir Tarasenko, who signed for 10.3 per cent against the cap in 2015.

Could this be where Connor and Aho fall in? Consider that after Hall and Tarasenko's first three seasons, they averaged 0.84 and 0.75 points per game, respectively. As for goal rates, Hall averaged 0.38 per game while Tarasenko sat at 0.37.

Connor (0.7) and Aho (0.74) both have lower point rates than those two, but their goal rates compare much better. Connor has scored 0.35 goals per game to this point in his career and is on track for his second 30-goal season, which neither Hall nor Tarasenko pulled off before their ELCs expired. Meanwhile, Aho averages 0.32 goals per game and was one away from 30 last season.

The best fit here could be Boeser. Clouding this comp, however, is the fact he played just nine games in his first season, was limited to 62 games by injury last season, and has missed a fair amount of time to injury again this season.

But Boeser's 0.85 points per game compares well to what Hall and Tarasenko had accomplished to a similar point, while Boeser's 0.46 goals per game tops everyone else in this group.

Contract Comparable No. 5: Johnny Gaudreau's 9.2 cap percentage

Possible comparables: Kyle Connor, Sebastian Aho

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap
Taylor Hall	2012	9.2	\$6.75 million	\$73 million
RFAs	2019	9.2	\$7.7 million	\$83 million

Further to the points above, Gaudreau signed more recently than Tarasenko and Hall for a smaller cap percentage, despite owning a better points per game mark than the other two at the time of signing (0.89). It seems most likely that Connor and Aho would fall somewhere between 9.2 per cent and 10.3 per cent on their next deals. But



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performance the rest of this season will still factor in heavily on what both can get — they are still playing for these contracts.

Contract Comparable No. 6: David Pastrnak's 8.89 cap percentage

Possible comparables: Matthew Tkachuk

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap
David Pastrnak	2017	8.89	\$6.66 million	\$75 million
RFA's	2019	8.89	\$7.4 million	\$83 million

Pastrnak is an interesting case because most forget he racked up just 53 combined points over his first two NHL seasons. He then broke out in his contract year with 34 goals and 74 points to earn his big deal. Could this be the high end of where Tkachuk ends up?

Here's your argument for why the Flames' productive shift disturber could be the team's highest paid player both next season and even, perhaps, in franchise history. On pace for another season of year-over-year production growth and seemingly destined to be a future captain, Tkachuk is currently producing at a level close to both Gaudreau and Sean Monahan.

Compare Tkachuk's production to Pastrnak's prior to his deal, and the Flames' winger has both higher points- and goals-per-game totals in his first two years and is on pace to eclipse what Pastrnak did in his breakout, contract year.

Today, Gaudreau has the highest AAV of all Flames forwards at \$6.75 million. If Tkachuk were to sign for that same AAV it would represent 8.13 per cent against an \$83 million cap, a comparable percentage to what other left wingers such as Filip Forsberg (8.2), Artemi Panarin (8.2), Brandon Saad (8.2), Jonathan Huberdeau (8.1) and Nikolaj Ehlers (8.0) earned off their entry-level deals. And before you jump to the conclusion that second-liner Tkachuk doesn't belong in that group, consider that his 0.74 career points per game is higher than all of them but Panarin at the conclusion of their ELCs.

So at the bare minimum, Tkachuk should be able to get at least the same AAV as Gaudreau on a long-term deal, but depending on how the rest of Tkachuk's season plays out, Pastrnak's deal and a \$7.4 million AAV could still be in play.

Contract Comparable No. 7: Seth Jones' 7.4 cap percentage

Possible comparables: Zach Werenski, Ivan Provorov

Player	Year	Cap %	AAV	Total Cap
Seth Jones	2016	7.4	\$5.4 million	\$73 million
RFA's	2019	7.4	\$6.2 million	\$83 million

Likely because defencemen typically take longer to blossom at the NHL level, they more often than not sign bridge deals before a long-term extension. Aaron Ekblad is the standard for blueliners coming off their ELCs, signing for 10.27 per cent against the cap. But with that deal now appearing to be an outlier, Seth Jones' next-best rate at 7.4 per cent is looking like a better comp for this year's class of defencemen RFA's.

Jones' teammate Werenski is a natural comparison, though his game leans more on offence than does Jones' and he plays roughly four minutes less per game than Jones. As a result, if Werenski signs long-term he may end up coming in under this 7.4 per cent.

Provorov, however, could more easily make the case for Jones' dollars. He's heavily relied upon in Philadelphia's penalty kill, is used on the second power play unit and averages 24:46 per game (13th highest at the position league-wide). He's also coming off a 17-goal season that tied for the league lead among blueliners. Granted his offence has stagnated this year, but this is a hibernating monster who will have more than a few years of Norris contention in his career.

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Sportsnet.ca / Grinding style of play gives Canadiens fits again vs. Wild

Eric Engels

December 12, 2018, 12:02 AM

The Minnesota Wild came into Tuesday's game having lost five of their last six.

Over that stretch, starting goaltender Devan Dubnyk was a disaster — stopping under 85 per cent of the shots he faced and getting yanked out of his net on more than one occasion.

But a visit from the Montreal Canadiens had potential to be a cure-all for Dubnyk and the Wild, even if they had come to town on a three-game winning streak.

It proved to be exactly that. The home team recorded its eighth consecutive win against the Canadiens — a 7-1 laugh. And Dubnyk, who had a lifetime record of 7-1-1, a 2.21 goals-against average and a .929 save percentage against them, made 29 saves.

Our takeaways from the blowout:

Stream over 500 NHL games blackout-free, including the Flames, Oilers, Leafs and Canucks. Plus Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey and more.

The Canadiens' backup had sat idle for seven straight games and started off this one exhibiting virtually no signs of rust.

Antti Niemi made huge saves on Nino Niederreiter, Zach Parise, Joel Eriksson Ek and Jonas Brodin before Niederreiter tipped home the game's first goal 14 minutes in. And he shut the door while the Canadiens slept their way through the rest of the first period, allowing Montreal to escape the first 20 minutes without any further damage done.

Outside of the first 10 minutes of the second period, over which the Canadiens put together a run that saw them outshoot the Wild 8-1, the team just didn't give Niemi a fighting chance.

Matt Dumba, Charlie Coyle, Eric Staal and Jared Spurgeon got open looks to give the Wild a 5-0 lead before the second frame came to a close. Another one for Dumba early in the third, and one for Parise, had coach Claude Julien mercy-pulling Niemi with 13:50 to play.

Carey Price, who replaced Niemi, had to turn aside a Parise breakaway to make his first stop. He stopped the bleeding at seven.

The Canadiens killed off seven of eight penalties in a 3-2 win over the Chicago Blackhawks on Sunday, but they allowed Minnesota to score on all four of its power plays Tuesday.

Their own power play was once again an unmitigated disaster, producing virtually no scoring chances on two opportunities and allowing a short-handed goal 13 seconds into their first chance.

If Shea Weber's return to Montreal's lineup seven games ago was supposed to make all the difference for the team's struggling power play, his presence hasn't had its desired effect in that department. The Canadiens have converted on one of 18 opportunities since he came back in the last week of November.



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Without reading too deeply into a game the Canadiens probably feel should be filed and forgotten, the slow-it-down, grind-it-out style the Wild employ gave the boys in bleu, blanc et rouge fits.

Even if you dismiss the way they fell apart in the second period, the way the Canadiens were struggling to break out of their own end earlier — while the game was within reach — was indicative of the Wild's ability to force play to the outside and capitalize on the size mismatch between them and their opponents.

We saw something similar from the Canadiens in a recent 3-1 loss to the San Jose Sharks, with the damage being done before they responded with a strong second period and a really strong third period. And we also saw the same story unfold in three losses to the Buffalo Sabres, who play similarly to the Wild.

Mike Reilly could help...

Reilly was scratched from Tuesday's game against his former team after a horror-show performance against the Blackhawks on Sunday.

The defenceman's speed and his puck-moving can help the Canadiens counter teams like the Wild, Sharks and Sabres moving forward. But it would be a fallacy to suggest he could have made all the difference for the Canadiens in Tuesday's game.

Perhaps being scratched in this situation — not just against his old team but also in his home state — will get him to play with the urgency Julien is looking for.

"You can't keep turning pucks over with sloppy plays," said Julien on Nov. 26 to explain why Reilly had found himself scratched from a sequence of games. "He knows that. So that's where we need consistency. He has the potential, but you can't have a guy in your lineup that you don't know what you're going to get on a nightly basis."

There have been games where Reilly has been Montreal's best defenceman, but there are others where he has been its worst. That's why Tuesday marked the sixth time he's sat out.

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.

He can be a lethal player and he showed it on both goals he scored in this one.

The first one Dumba scored was a laser of a one-timer on the power play, beating Niemi on the blocker side. His second one also came on the power play and beat Niemi on the blocker side, when he cruised into the slot on his strong side, received a pass from Mikael Granlund, and wired a wristshot bar-down.

That gave Dumba his 12th goal of the season, which leads all other NHL defencemen by two.

In a bit of a funk — and with his name being bandied about in trade rumours — Coyle played one of his best games of the season.

Replacing the injured Mikko Koivu in the middle of the ice, Coyle was a threat to score on a couple of occasions early in the game before he broke through short-handed in the second period.

He undressed Weber on the play and finished on the backhand side. It was a beauty.

If the Canadiens are among the teams interested — it's been reported they've shown interest throughout the years — they got a pretty good taste of what the six-foot-three, 26-year-old could add to the equation for them.

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TSN.CA / Hunter: Canada must be 'fastest' World Juniors team yet

Mark Masters

TSN reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on Team Canada, which held its first practice of the World Juniors selection camp at the Q Centre in Victoria on Tuesday.

Head coach Tim Hunter and the Team Canada staff met individually with all 34 players at the World Juniors selection camp before the on-ice sessions began. Suffice it to say, nobody should be unclear about where they stand as the intense evaluation process gets going.

"We pointed out their identity as a player and told them their strengths and what they had to do to have success and make the World Junior team, added a few things they needed to work on and be more consistent with," Hunter revealed. "Everyone's here because they have an opportunity to make the team and we're going to give everyone a chance to play to their strengths, play to their identity and play in this environment."

But every player who makes the team will need to move and move quickly.

"One of the prerequisites is speed," Hunter said. "We have a great group of skating players, 31 skaters that can push the pace and that's the way we're going to play. We're going to be a fast team. We're going to try to be the fastest World Junior team yet. And we have a lot of work cut out for us, but that's the goal and that's the identity we're going to have."

This should be no surprise to those who attended Canada's summer camp in Kamloops, B.C., where one of the team-bonding activities was a Go-Cart race.

"I know Tim and the coaching staff are looking for players who can play with some pace and not only play with pace but think at that level as well and we have it right through the lineup," said retired NHL defenceman Steve Staios, part of Canada's management group.

"The buzzwords in hockey nowadays are 'fast' and 'speed,'" Hunter said, "but there's a lot of ways to get there and it's not just skating fast, it's being fast in every aspect of the game, with and without the puck, off faceoffs, on your forecheck, tracking back. I've studied that really hard over the last two years and talked to some great hockey minds and got some great opinions on it so we'll implement a lot of the stuff. I've used it with my own team in Moose Jaw this year. We've had a lot of success with some of the things."

The first chance for the players to really impress at the four-day camp will come on Wednesday when Canada plays the first of three scrimmages against a group of university all-stars.

Canada aiming 'to be the fastest World Junior team yet'

Head coach Tim Hunter and the Team Canada staff met individually with each player here on Monday night outlining what they viewed as each guy's identity while also pointing out areas where they can be more consistent. But when it comes to the group as a whole, it's crystal clear what the team identity will be.

Things are looking up when it comes to a couple of Los Angeles Kings prospects dealing with injury issues.

Gabe Vilardi has been sidelined for a significant part of the last two seasons due to injury issues, but was officially loaned to Hockey Canada on Monday. He played just 32 regular season games with the Kingston Frontenacs in the OHL last season and has been limited to just four games — on a recent AHL conditioning stint — this season.



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When healthy, Vilardi has shown the promise that led Los Angeles to select him 11th overall in 2017. He posted 11 goals and 11 assists in 16 playoff games with the Frontenacs last spring.

But a lingering back issue has really set the 19-year-old back and he's been rehabbing in Los Angeles until finally getting into a few games with the AHL's Ontario Reign.

"It's exciting," said Staios, the president and general manager of the Hamilton Bulldogs. "I've seen this player in the Ontario Hockey League sort of come through our system there and be an impactful player and maybe one of the most impactful players in the CHL when he's healthy."

Standing six-foot-three, 207 pounds, Vilardi has proven to be a dominant player below the dots.

"That's why we like him so much," said Hunter. "He's dynamic, he's strong, he's powerful, he takes the puck to the net and protects the puck really well and creates offence from that big body and range."

Vilardi picked up one assist in his four games in the AHL.

After injury-plagued stretch, Vilardi could provide huge boost to Canada

Kingston's Gabe Vilardi has missed significant time during the last two seasons due to injuries, including a nagging back issue. The Kings prospect has been rehabbing in L.A. and recently completed a conditioning stint in the AHL representing the only four games he's played this season. Vilardi, a dominant force below the dots, has now been loaned to Team Canada for this week's selection camp and, if healthy, can be a game changer at the World Juniors.

The other injury issue belongs to Jaret Anderson-Dolan, who broke his wrist on Oct. 27 in just his second game back with the Spokane Chiefs. The Kings prospect needed surgery and the initial timeline was that the recovery would take around six to eight weeks.

"We got some really positive feedback (Monday) on Jaret," said Shawn Bullock, Hockey Canada's director of men's national teams.

Hunter certainly doesn't anticipate having any issues assessing Anderson-Dolan, who was impressive at Canada's summer camp.

"He's got his cast off and he's passing and shooting so I don't see a real problem," he said. "He's been skating and feeling the puck. He wouldn't be here if we didn't believe he could make this team and contribute to this team."

Hunter was an assistant coach with Team Canada at the last two World Juniors. Two years ago, forward Blake Speers cracked the roster despite suffering a broken wrist on Oct. 27 just like Anderson-Dolan. In both situations, the player had just returned to the OHL after getting a brief NHL audition. And last year, the status of defenceman Dante Fabbro remained in doubt until Boxing Day. Initially cut, Josh Mahura was brought back to skate with the group just in case Fabbro wasn't ready.

"We want the best players and we're patient," Hunter said. "We went through it with a couple guys last year (Kale) Clague and Fabbro and our training staff and our doctors did a tremendous job. And I learned a new term and that was 'Smart minutes.' Get a guy in the lineup and play him and let him function, but don't overplay him and just ease him in and that's what we did with those scenarios. So, we want the best players available and we're going to be patient in this process."

Per TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie, Anderson-Dolan is cleared for practice this week, but not to take contact:

It may be a long shot at this point, but there's still a chance Team Canada could get help from the NHL. Forwards Robert Thomas (St. Louis Blues) and Michael Rasmussen (Detroit Red Wings) are both eligible to play at the World Juniors should their professional teams choose to make them available.

"No doors are completely closed," Bullock said on Monday night. "Obviously, those are players we'd love to have as part of the program. We basically set a deadline, which is the NHL player roster freeze (Dec.

19-28) so we feel we still got over a week to get an answer from the clubs."

'No doors completely closed': Canada holding out hope for Thomas and Rasmussen

Team Canada is still holding out hope that help may be coming from the NHL. Forwards Robert Thomas and Michael Rasmussen are eligible to play at the World Juniors, but the pair are currently playing consistent minutes with the Blues and Red Wings respectively. 'Players we'd love to have,' said Shawn Bullock, Hockey Canada's director of men's national teams. 'We still have over a week to get that answer from the club teams.'

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TSN.CA / Tavares pushing Marnier to use his shot more often

Kristen Shilton

TSN's Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Hurricanes held a 10:30 a.m. morning skate at PNC Arena, followed by the Leafs' optional morning skate.

It's hard to argue any player has been more dynamic for the Maple Leafs this season than Mitch Marnier. He's their leader in points (40) and assists (34) with the second-most shots (82), but he has found the back of the net only six times.

Marnier's use of his shot has started to noticeably decline lately. In two of his last four games the winger has put zero pucks on net, deferring on open shots to pass. That's not exactly what Mike Babcock would like to see from the 21-year-old, but he's also loath to get in his ear about it.

"I think Mitch is one of those guys where it's pretty hard to give advice to, because he makes the right play most of the time," Babcock said after the Leafs' optional morning skate. "But we encourage him all the time in practice to be shooting it. I think on the power play he can shoot it more as well because he has a dangerous shot, but he makes a lot of good decisions. You hate to be giving him too much advice there."

John Tavares has reaped the biggest reward from Marnier's pass-first mentality, racking up a team-leading 18 goals in 30 games with Marnier by his side at even strength and on the power play. With so many pucks dropping for him thus far, Tavares is lobbying for Marnier to take care of himself out on the ice, too.

"I'm on him right now. We've got to get him one in the back of the net, spread the wealth around," Tavares said. "I think he's got a lot of deception in his game and he can be very difficult to read. His ability to look players off and find the passing lanes – I think he can be very similar with his shot."

Tavares stressed it doesn't have to be "the hardest shot in the league" to be effective.

"It's just about being able to fool the goaltender, just trying to be hard to read and trying not to be predictable," he said.

In the Carolina Hurricanes' dressing room, defencemen are very familiar with how dangerous Marnier can be at any given moment – regardless of how frequently he's shooting.

"You watch a lot of the highlights and you don't know whether he's shooting or passing it down low, back door, what he can do through the



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seam," said Trevor van Riemsdyk. "He can obviously make any pass in the book and he's deceptive in the way he does it and makes it hard to read."

That's why Tavares said he "always [has] to be ready" when taking a shift with Marner, prepared for plays ranging from regular to remarkable that may generate a scoring chance.

"I think what's really going to help him be a good player for a long time is his commitment without the puck to get it back and reading the play defensively and doing those things," Tavares said. "I think that leads to him having the puck so much and doing what he does best, making plays and finding people in open ice and creating opportunities."

*Tuesday's game will be the 700th of Tavares' NHL career, but the Leafs centre insists his emotions come game time will be the same as they were in his earliest days around the sport.

"The feeling I have playing the game hasn't changed since I was a kid," he said. "I recognize that's something pretty special, even though it also becomes how you make a living...just having that same basic feeling, loving it as much as I do was always special to me."

Tavares spent the first nine years of his career with the New York Islanders, who selected him first overall in the 2009 NHL Entry Draft. In 669 games there, he recorded 272 goals and 349 assists before opting to leave for the Leafs in free agency last summer. He has 18 goals and 14 assists this year in 30 games.

"Being able to play against the best in the world at this level consistently and for that level of time, I'm proud of it and I want to keep it going," Tavares said.

Finding instant chemistry with Marner is part of what Tavares credits for his team-leading goal production this season.

"I think there's been a lot of growth for our line and our game," said Tavares, who will skate with Marner and Connor Brown on Tuesday. "[I'm] just trying to be hungry for the opportunity and wanting to be in the space where you can create a chance to be able to put it in."

Three weeks ago in Carolina, the Leafs learned how much damage a bad first period can do against an opportunistic team like the Hurricanes.

Toronto lost that first meeting of the season 5-2, giving up 29 shots in the first period and 45 overall. The Leafs were still only down 2-1 after 20 minutes, but never escaped from the shadow of that opening frame.

They're aiming to do things differently in Tuesday's rematch.

"It starts with their D; it's probably one of the best D corps in the league," said Jake Gardiner of limiting Carolina's chances. "If we can try to cut off passes to the top and limit that, it will help."

Early Tuesday morning, Babcock went back through all 29 shots the Leafs saw in that first period to assess what went wrong, and determined the same thing he did on the night of their defeat – when Toronto stopped working early the team veered off the path to victory.

"We lost every race and every battle in the first period in this building," he said. "We had a real good second, got ourselves back to a spot and then weren't able to execute on it. You have to start on time in this league and we all know that. That's the way to have success."

Carolina found room to operate against Toronto by keeping their plan simple but strategic, something the Leafs can combat with more attention to detail in their own game.

"They play a pretty straight north-south game, play with speed and quickness and throw a lot of pucks at the net and send a lot of people there," said Tavares. "It's a pretty mobile defence. They do a pretty good job of getting out of their own end. For us, we have to have that tenacity and that determination to close time and space and get through the neutral zone and forecheck well."

Hurricanes' captain Justin Williams summed up how to slow the Leafs down with a familiar phrase – "time and space, time and space" – and said the key for Carolina notching another victory over Toronto will be to "make their good players play defence."

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1120668 Websites

TSN.CA / Smith finding his game has helped spark Flames

Frank Seravalli

Turns out, the secret to the Calgary Flames' rise to the top of the Western Conference is really no secret at all.

The Flames have finally gotten the solid goaltending that's eluded them, well, since Miikka Kiprusoff retired six years ago.

"You can't have success without it," Flames GM Brad Treliving said Monday.

For the first six weeks of the season, the Flames had the NHL's fourth-worst save percentage at .891. Since Nov. 15, the Flames have the fourth-best save percentage at .921, while allowing the second-fewest goals against in the league.

The Flames were a middling 10-8-1 to start the season. They've gone 9-2-1 since, acquiring nearly the same number of points in the standings in seven fewer games.

Along the way, 36-year-old Mike Smith somehow pulled himself off the scrap heap, turning back the clock to the Kiprusoff era with a near flawless six-game run (6-0-0) in which he's allowed just nine goals against since Nov. 15.

Smith struggled so much in the early going, with a 5-7-1 mark and .876 save percentage, that his save percentage for the season is still just .894 after this hot stretch. Calgary's goal differential has morphed from plus-1 (56-55) to a staggering plus-23 (49-26) over that stretch.

David Rittich was Calgary's only saving grace as Smith faltered. His year began with a 5-1-0 mark and .935 save percentage as he slowly slid into the driver's seat in net. They've traded hot hands since, with Smith picking up as Rittich cooled off.

"That to me has been one of the stories of the season for us," Treliving said. "There was a stretch where Smith was finding himself and his game and Rittich was excellent. We haven't given David the run support he's needed in his last few starts. I think he's been really good for us."

"I said it in training camp and I really believe it: You need two goalies in the league now. The days of one guy playing 70 games are over. There's not a heck of a lot of [Martin] Brodeurs anymore."

The TSN Turning Point in the season was Nov. 15, at least statistically, but Treliving pinpointed Calgary's 9-1 drubbing at the hands of the visiting Pittsburgh Penguins on Oct. 25 as perhaps the emotional turning point. He says the Flames have buttoned it up defensively since then, with coach Bill Peters "leaving no stone unturned" to find an answer.

"There have been a few blips on the screen, but if you look at our data with chances, shots against, we've cleaned up a lot defensively," Treliving said. "We're spending less time in our end, giving up less. Our young defence has been a stabilizer for us."

Treliving highlighted the play of Rasmus Andersson, 22, and Oliver Kyllington, 21, for stepping up while early Norris Trophy candidate Mark



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Giordano was serving his two-game suspension and Juuso Valimaki and Michael Stone have missed time with injuries.

"You find players that way," Treliving said of the opportunity. "We have a fairly young group that's getting better each month."

One of Treliving's goals last summer was to fill out scoring depth, to not be so reliant on Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan for points. Matthew Tkachuk has taken a clear step forward as a driver of play and production for the Flames, but in a way, the seamless addition of Elias Lindholm from Carolina has further stratified the lineup.

Gaudreau, Monahan, Lindholm and Tkachuk are all north of 30 points, while the next closest forward, Mikael Backlund, is down at 17 points, sandwiched between three defencemen. The only other forward with double-digit points is Mark Jankowski at 10.

Calgary's ascent to the top of the Pacific Division has masked a miserable start to James Neal's run as a Flame. Neal, 31, has three goals and three assists for six points in 31 games in the first year of a five-year, \$28.75 million deal.

That's not a misprint: Neal – who has scored at least 20 goals in all 10 of his NHL seasons – is on pace for just eight goals. He had six for the Vegas Golden Knights in 20 playoff games last spring.

"I think James would be the first to tell you he'd like to shoot more in the net," Treliving said. "I try to look more at the positive side of things. I watch Lindholm jumping into the top tier of scorers, the contributions from Jankowski, [Sam] Bennett and [Derek] Ryan.

"But yes, absolutely, we want to get James going."

Neal needs 17 goals in his final 51 games to hit that 20-goal mark again. That's certainly possible for a career 12 per cent shooter who is down to 4.1 per cent this season. Given the turnaround Calgary has witnessed with Smith in net, nothing should be deemed impossible. Neal's re-emergence would make for a heck of an in-house trade deadline acquisition.

"We have to grow, we have to continue to get better," Treliving said. "We've got a lot of ability, but with each passing day on the calendar, the game continues to tighten up. I want us to be comfortable in one-goal games, those tight situations. We've got a lot of work to do, but we're happy where we're at."

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TSN.CA / The 7-Eleven Power Rankings: Flames top Western Conference

Staff Report

The Calgary Flames, as you recall, missed the playoffs last season. Well, it's a different story in 2018-19 as they've been torching the league in the last three weeks, going 9-2-1 in their last 12 games to climb into first place in the Western Conference.

Despite missing key parts of their puzzle during the first 31 games of the season – captain Mark Giordano sat out for a two-game suspension (the first in his 13-year career) and defensive centre Mikael Backlund is now gone with a concussion, for example – the Flames continue to dig deep and rack up points, relying on a veteran roster as well as AHL call-ups such as rookie blueliner Oliver Kylington to get the job done. Kylington, a 21-year-old Swede drafted 60th overall by Calgary in 2015, scored his

first NHL goal and added an assist in the Flames' 5-2 win over the Nashville Predators on Saturday.

Last Tuesday, the Flames rallied to outscore the Columbus Blue Jackets 9-6, with team leading scorer Johnny Gaudreau registering four points. Veteran goaltender Mike Smith has also returned to form lately, winning six straight games after going through a slump when he recorded six losses in eight games.

As such, Calgary moves up five spots to No. 3 in our weekly 7-Eleven Power Rankings, according to consensus rankings formulated by the TSN Power Ranking panel of Ray Ferraro, Jeff O'Neill, Jamie McLennan, Craig Button and Darren Dreger.

Last week's No. 2-ranked team, the Tampa Bay Lightning, is the unanimous No. 1 team this week after winning six straight games. The Bolts lead the NHL in wins (23), points (47), have the league's second best power play (29.0 percentage) and are scoring a league-high 3.94 goals a game.

Three of the top-five teams in this week's rankings are Canadian, with the No. 2 Toronto Maple Leafs – who will be without the services of suspended forward Zach Hyman for two games – followed by the Flames and the Winnipeg Jets in the No. 4 position. The Jets, who have won five of six, are ranked just ahead of the No.5 Predators, who have lost two straight and are winless in their last six road games (0-5-1).

Most of Canada's other teams moved up in our rankings this week, with the Edmonton Oilers landing four spots higher (No. 12) after going 3-1-0 last week. The Montreal Canadiens climb to No. 15 from No. 18 a week ago after three straight victories, including back-to-back wins over the No. 23 Ottawa Senators, who slip a spot from last week. The Vancouver Canucks had a positive week (2-1-0) to jump out of our panel's bottom five and into the No. 26 spot after sitting No. 29 a week ago.

The Pittsburgh Penguins make the biggest leap of the week, to No. 17 from No. 24, after earning five of a possible six points in their last three games while the Blue Jackets register the most significant drop of the week, falling six spots to No. 16 following a 1-2-0 week after being ranked No. 10 last week.

The NHL's worst teams this week, according to our panel, include the No. 27 Philadelphia Flyers, New Jersey Devils at No. 28, the No. 29 Los Angeles Kings, St. Louis Blues at No. 30 and the best-before-date-has-expired Chicago Blackhawks dead last at No. 31. The Blackhawks, who have problems galore including the league's worst power play, have lost seven straight and are now 3-11-2 under young coach Jeremy Colliton.

Tampa Bay Lightning

RECORD

23-7-1

LAST 10

9-1-0

LAST WEEK

2

Their six-game winning streak has featured an average of 5.0 goals scored per game. Nikita Kucherov leads in points with 11 in the six games; Steven Stamkos leads with five goals.

Toronto Maple Leafs

RECORD

20-9-1

LAST 10

6-3-1

LAST WEEK



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1

They have just four road losses, but two have been to potential playoff foe Boston, with scores of 5-1 and 6-3. In the latest loss, a Leaf goalie (Frederik Andersen) was replaced for the first time this season.

Calgary Flames

RECORD

19-10-2

LAST 10

7-2-1

LAST WEEK

8

The Flames had won five straight games before losing 1-0 to Edmonton but still lead the Western Conference. Johnny Gaudreau had 11 points in the five games and Elias Lindholm had 10.

Winnipeg Jets

RECORD

18-9-2

LAST 10

6-4-0

LAST WEEK

6

A shutout against the Jets (1-0 by St. Louis) is rare enough, especially when they averaged 4.5 goals in their previous six games (5-1-0). Their next game was a 7-1 defeat of Philadelphia.

Nashville Predators

RECORD

19-10-1

LAST 10

5-5-0

LAST WEEK

3

The Predators continued their losing ways on the road with losses in Vancouver and Calgary. That's six straight road losses (0-5-1) after starting out with a franchise-record eight straight road wins.

Colorado Avalanche

RECORD

17-8-5

Last 10

7-2-1

LAST WEEK

5

After six consecutive road wins they've lost two of three in convincing style, 6-3 to Pittsburgh and 7-1 to Tampa Bay. Even so, at 3.74 road goals scored per game they're second only to Toronto at 4.07.

Washington Capitals

RECORD

17-9-3

LAST 10

8-2-0

LAST WEEK

7

A 4-0 defeat of Columbus was Braden Holtby's first shutout since their opening game of the season. The Capitals have won six of their last seven on the road and nine of their last 11 overall.

Buffalo Sabres

RECORD

17-9-4

LAST 10

5-3-2

LAST WEEK

4

So much for that 10-game winning streak. The Sabres have lost five in a row, scoring just 12 goals, with the only notable offensive contributions coming from Sam Reinhart (five goals) and Jack Eichel (four).

Anaheim Ducks

RECORD

16-11-5

LAST 10

8-2-0

LAST WEEK

9

Anaheim's five-game winning streak – with four of the games on the road – ended with a home loss to Carolina. They followed that up with a shootout win over New Jersey in their next home game.

Boston Bruins

RECORD

16-10-4

LAST 10

5-4-1

LAST WEEK

11

The Bruins ended a three-game skid by beating Toronto 6-3. In their previous 11 games they had failed to score more than three goals, averaging 1.7 per game as they miss injured star Patrice Bergeron.

Vegas Golden Knights

RECORD

17-14-1

LAST 10

8-2-0

LAST WEEK

17

Marc-Andre Fleury had a nice run before losing 5-1 to L.A. In the eight previous games he was 7-1-0 with two shutouts, a .933 save percentage and a 2.00 GAA. He now leads the NHL in wins with 17.



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Edmonton Oilers

RECORD

16-12-2

LAST 10

7-2-1

LAST WEEK

16

The Oilers continued their perfect record at home under Ken Hitchcock with a 1-0 win over Calgary to give them five straight in Edmonton. Prior to Hitchcock taking over they were 4-4-1 at home.

Dallas Stars

RECORD

16-11-3

LAST 10

5-4-1

LAST WEEK

12

The Stars ran their winning streak to four with a 3-2 defeat of San Jose before losing at Vegas on Sunday. Brett Ritchie scored consecutive game-winning goals, his only two goals on the season.

San Jose Sharks

RECORD

15-11-5

LAST 10

4-4-2

LAST WEEK

15

The Sharks allowed 40 shots against Carolina, only the third time this season they've allowed 40 or more, and twice against the Hurricanes. They rank fifth in fewest shots against at 27.9 per game.

Montreal Canadiens

RECORD

15-10-5

LAST 10

4-4-2

LAST WEEK

18

Back-to-back games against Ottawa resulted in back-to-back wins, both by the same 5-2 score. Jonathan Drouin has been a hot scorer, with 16 points in 15 games since Nov. 8.

Columbus Blue Jackets

16. Columbus Blue Jackets

RECORD

16-11-2

LAST 10

5-5-0

LAST WEEK

10

For whatever reason, the Blue Jackets allow a lot of home goals – including nine in a blowout loss to Calgary. They're giving up 3.57 goals per game at home, second most in the NHL behind St. Louis.

Pittsburgh Penguins

RECORD

12-10-6

LAST 10

5-2-3

LAST WEEK

24

In the nine games since Sidney Crosby returned to the lineup, the Penguins are 5-2-2 and Crosby has scored seven goals, leading the team with 15. They have five players with goals in the double digits.

Minnesota Wild

RECORD

15-12-2

LAST 10

3-7-0

LAST WEEK

13

Defensive problems have been an issue for the Wild lately. They have just one win in their last six games and have allowed 22 goals in the five losses. Devan Dubnyk has just one win in his last five.

New York Islanders

RECORD

14-11-3

LAST 10

4-5-1

LAST WEEK

14

The Islanders scored their first power play goal in 10 games in a 3-2 win over Detroit after going 0-for-19 in their previous nine. They also improved their record to 4-0 when giving up 20 or fewer shots.

Carolina Hurricanes

RECORD

13-11-4

LAST 10

5-4-1

LAST WEEK

19

The Hurricanes killed off five power plays in their 4-1 win over Anaheim. Since Nov. 8 they have killed off 31 of 33 shorthanded situations for a league-best 93.9 percentage during that time span.

New York Rangers

RECORD



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14-12-3

LAST 10

5-4-1

LAST WEEK

23

It was an odd week for the Rangers, with just one game, a shootout win at Florida. Even odder is that it was their fourth road win of the season, all four of them coming in a shootout.

Detroit Red Wings

RECORD

13-13-4

LAST 10

4-4-2

LAST WEEK

20

A home loss to the N.Y. Islanders means the Red Wings have just one home win in their last six (1-3-2). On the positive side, Gustav Nyquist has nine points in the team's last five games.

Ottawa Senators

RECORD

13-14-4

LAST 10

4-5-1

LAST WEEK

22

A 2-1 overtime victory over Pittsburgh gave the Senators their third win in their last four home games and their fifth in their last eight in Ottawa. They're 10-5-3 at home and 3-9-1 on the road.

Arizona Coyotes

RECORD

13-13-2

LAST 10

4-5-1

LAST WEEK

21

It's a season of ups and downs for the Coyotes. After losing four in a row, they won four straight. They're currently in losing mode, with two losses in a row and they've lost six of seven games at home.

Florida Panthers

RECORD

11-11-6

LAST 10

3-4-3

LAST WEEK

25

It was a strange eight-game homestand for the Panthers, going 3-2-3 but five of the eight games went to OT, one of those to a shootout. They had at least one power play goal in all eight games.

Vancouver Canucks

RECORD

13-16-3

LAST 10

3-6-1

LAST WEEK

29

They went over a month between home wins, defeating Nashville 5-3 to end an eight-game home skid (0-7-1). They followed that up with a 6-1 win in St. Louis, with Elias Pettersson netting five points.

Philadelphia Flyers

RECORD

12-13-3

LAST 10

3-5-2

LAST WEEK

26

Is Anthony Stolarz the answer to the Flyers' net woes? He's 2-1-1, which included a 28-save win over the Sabres on Saturday, ending Buffalo's nine-game home point streak with a 6-2 win.

New Jersey Devils

RECORD

10-12-6

LAST 10

2-4-4

LAST WEEK

27

The Devils have managed to earn points in five of their last eight, but only one of those games was a win. Three were OT losses and one was a shootout loss. Kyle Palmieri has four goals in two games.

Los Angeles Kings

RECORD

11-18-1

LAST 10

4-6-0

LAST WEEK

30

Nikita Scherbak scored 8:12 into his Kings debut to help Los Angeles to a 5-1 win over Vegas and their largest margin of victory of the season. Five times they've been defeated by at least four goals.

St. Louis Blues

RECORD

10-14-4

LAST 10



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3-6-1

LAST WEEK

31

Hot and cold goalie Jake Allen recorded his first shutout of the season, 1-0 over Winnipeg. Hot Allen became Cold Allen when he had to be pulled in a 6-1 loss to Vancouver on home ice in his next start.

Chicago Blackhawks

RECORD

9-17-5

LAST 10

1-9-0

LAST WEEK

28

The Blackhawks' losing streak is now at seven games, all in regulation. They've been outscored 30-17 in those games and have a measly two power play goals in 24 attempts (8.3 percentage).

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