



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2018



Mistakes doom Canes in 6-4 loss

By Adam Gold radio host 99.9 the Fan

The last time the Carolina Hurricanes skated against the Canadiens, Curtis McElhinney had to fend off 48 shots in a 2-1 game that was more survival than victory. Thursday night at the Bell Centre, it was Petr Mrazek's turn in the shooting gallery. Unfortunately, the outcome was far different as Montreal beat the Canes 6-4.

Wait, the Canes scored FOUR GOALS?

I'll let you gather yourself for a moment.

Yes, four goals, all at even strength, in the same game. Call it a Christmas miracle. Sadly, however, the season is also for giving and that was the theme of the evening.

For the second straight game the Hurricanes were far too generous in the defensive zone and as a result they've yielded nine goals in six periods. Against the Leafs, Carolina was credited with 21 give aways, four of them leading to goals including the one Dougie Hamilton scored into his own net.

Thursday against the Canadiens, the Canes gave the puck away 17 times and each of the first three Montreal goals came directly off those miscues. Haydn Fleury, Justin Faulk and Jaccob Slavin took turns turning over the puck and Matthew Peca, Jeff Petry and Brendan Gallagher were more than happy to accept the offerings.

The worst part about how this game unfolded was that it spoiled a breakout performance from 18-year old rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov. The 2nd overall pick was great again tonight, scoring twice — the first two goals for Carolina — registered seven shots on Carey Price and probably could have had scored one or two more goals on the night. Svechnikov now has eight goals on the year, good for third on the team behind Michael Ferland (11) and Sebastian Aho, who scored past a goaltender for the first time in 11 games.

Sadly, we'll not be talking about how dynamic and dangerous the kid was against the Canadiens. We're going to be discussing how many mistakes were made by the unit that was supposed to be Carolina's best heading into the year.

The blue line was supposed to be the Hurricanes' bedrock this year. It was the position group that was the envy of the entire league. Defensive prowess, offensive firepower,

interchangeable pieces, skating ability, intelligence, left-right balance, it was all there.

Or so we thought. Dougie Hamilton, coming off a 17-goal campaign in Calgary, has just three. Justin Faulk has one — ONE — goal in 30 games. Slavin scored his 3rd of the season in the loss, but for the second straight game committed a costly turnover that led to a goal. At some point, and we've reached it, what we thought has to give way to what we see. And, the truth is that the Carolina defensive corps has been a disappointment.

They're not alone, goal scoring could certainly take some of that pressure off. Aho and Tuevo Teravainen, who scored 29 and 23, respectively a year ago, and were counted on to take another step forward in production, have gone the other way. The Hurricanes were not constructed to have an 18-year old be their best offensive player.

If Aho and Teravainen aren't going to score goals — and, it's not unfair to have expected something in the neighborhood of 60, combined — then this team has zero chance of a playoff bid.

Montreal went 0 for 6 on the power play against the Hurricanes, who have now killed 48 off their last 51 penalties.

Mrazek was spectacular in the 1st and 2nd periods. But, the breakdowns in front of him took a toll as he wasn't great in the 3rd when the team needed a big save.

It's highly unlikely that he'd get the start back at PNC Arena against the division-leading Washington Capitals — who arrived in Raleigh Thursday afternoon. So....

Alex Nedeljkovic was pulled after two periods of Charlotte's 1-0 home win Thursday night with head coach Mike Vellucci offering that he was told that Nedeljkovic might be needed with the Hurricanes. So, while there has yet to be a recall, the Hurricanes might be peeking a little bit at their future against the defending Stanley Cup Champs.

Carolina is 1-4-1 in their last six games and have now dropped back to .500 (13-13-4) on the season.

Their 30 points, however, still only leaves them two points out of a playoff spot in the Metropolitan Division.

Washington opens up a 5-game homestead at PNC Arena that will see Arizona, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Boston all make visits before Santa comes to town.



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Preview: Capitals vs. Hurricanes

Canes host defending Cup champs to begin five-game homestand

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes open a five-game homestand by hosting the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals on the second half of a back-to-back set.

The five-game homestand will span 10 days and take the Canes into the three-day holiday break.

Correcting Mistakes

The front half of this back-to-back set was a frustrating result in Montreal: a 6-4 loss to the Canadiens.

There were some tangible takeaways. Andrei Svechnikov scored two goals, the first multi-goal game of his career, and he was a difference maker on the ice. The Canes didn't have the best first 40 minutes, but they didn't quit and clawed their way back into the game multiple times. And, they potted four goals on Carey Price, perhaps something that will spark some confidence for a team starved for offense.

But, the mistakes outweighed the good, and the Canes couldn't out-score their unforced errors. Careless play with the puck and turnovers led to goals for the Canadiens, and quick responses from Montreal in the third quashed any comeback hopes for the Canes.

"I'm not happy. We needed much more out of certain guys and didn't have it tonight. That's frustrating, especially after we fight to get back," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Terrible game, and we're playing terrible, but we dig and get back and make really bad decisions. That's the frustrating part for me."

The Canes have surrendered 10 goals in their last two games and have not been pleased with their defensive efforts.

"The guys we count on are making mistakes, and that's a big problem," Brind'Amour said. "Our D have to be better. Let's be honest. Holy moly. That's supposed to be the best part of our group."

So, what needs correcting heading into a match-up against the defending Cup champs?

"The turnovers, number one. The puck's on your tape and suddenly it's on their tape. That can't happen," Brind'Amour said. "Just in general, we weren't competitive enough as a

team to start the game. We got what we deserved, really. Yeah, we came back and played pretty good - or better. We looked like a team. But you can't win in the NHL with our group when you play a period of hockey. That's not going to happen."

Svechnikov's Confidence Grows

With each game he plays, Svechnikov is becoming more confident in his abilities in the NHL.

No more was that evident than on his first goal of the game, when he put his size, speed and skill on display in a power drive to the net to score a backhand beauty.

"He had a great night," Jaccob Slavin said. "That first goal was just power."

"Right now, I'm getting more confidence in every game," Svechnikov said.

Svechnikov tied the game briefly in the third period by pumping in his own rebound, and he finished the night with a pair of goals, seven shots on goal, nine shot attempts and a hit in 16:46 of ice time.

"You can see the confidence coming," Slavin said. "He's a strong kid who skates really well. When he starts driving wide, you know something's going to happen."

"He looked like he was trying to win the game for us. That's what we need more of," Brind'Amour said.

"He's getting to be dynamic with the puck."

The Barnaul, Russia, native will now line up against a countryman and one of the greatest to play the game in Alex Ovechkin.

"He's good, and they've got a good team," Svechnikov said. "We want to win that game."

The Opposition

The Capitals are coming off a 6-2 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday in which leading scorer Alex Ovechkin recorded a hat trick and Nicklas Backstrom recorded four assists. The victory was the Capitals' third in a row and 10th in their last 12 games. The defending champs sit atop the Metropolitan Division with 39 points (18-9-3).

AT THE RINK

It's a 7:30 p.m. puck drop, but doors will open at 6 p.m. The first 10,000 fans in attendance will receive a Bojangles'



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mystery gift card valued between \$1 and \$100. Good luck! Bo Time is in your future. And, it's Friday, which means 16 oz. aluminum bottles of Bud Light are just \$5.

The Toy Drive continues through Sunday, Dec. 16. Fans who donate one new, unopened toy will receive a \$10 coupon to Buffalo Brothers and will be entered to win a gameday experience or autographed prize. More details can be found here.

Recap: Canes Can't Catch Canadiens

Svechnikov tallies twice but Canes fall, 6-4

by Michael Smith

MONTREAL - Andrei Svechnikov scored two goals, but the Carolina Hurricanes couldn't keep pace with the Montreal Canadiens in a 6-4 loss.

Jacob Slavin and Sebastian Aho also scored third-period goals for the Hurricanes, but quick responses from the Canadiens proved difficult to overcome.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game.

One

There is no quit in this team, but the Hurricanes can't out-score their mistakes.

Careless play with the puck and turnovers spelled trouble for the Hurricanes more often than they should have tonight, and they came at untimely junctures of the game.

"We weren't taking care of the puck," Slavin said. "We've got to stay right on them and keep our foot on the gas. We can't take a breath."

"I'm not happy. We needed much more out of certain guys and didn't have it tonight. That's frustrating, especially after we fight to get back," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Terrible game, and we're playing terrible, but we dig and get back and make really bad decisions. That's the frustrating part for me. How we started was really frustrating for me. I don't get that one."

The Hurricanes did indeed start slow out of the gate - they didn't register a shot in the first seven or so minutes of the game and were out-shot 12-4 in the first period - but Petr Mrazek was sharp. He was the reason the Canes remained in the game through a scoreless first period and a 2-1 deficit in the second.

"He played awesome tonight," Slavin said. "The first two periods we weren't there, and he kept us in it."

"We had a good goaltending performance that held us in there and kept us in the game," Brind'Amour said.

Two

When the Hurricanes selected Svechnikov with the second overall pick in this summer's draft, they knew they were getting size, speed and skill in an one incredibly talented package. All three of those traits were on display with his

The first cash drawing of the 50/50 Raffle will take place tonight. Half of the jackpot will raise funds for children's health and educational needs throughout North Carolina while the other half goes to one lucky winner. Ticket prices and all the raffle details can be found here.

WATCH, LISTEN & STREAM

Watch: FOX Sports Carolinas, FOX Sports app

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes app, Hurricanes.com/Listen

highlight-reel goal that gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead in the second period.

After accepting a pass at center ice, Svechnikov put his shoulder down, turned on the afterburners and blew past Shea Weber, who could only hope to reach with his stick. But there was no stopping Svechnikov, who then roofed a backhand beauty.

"He had a great night," Slavin said. "That first goal was just power."

Svechnikov wasn't finished. Just 23 seconds into the third period, Justin Williams placed a nice pass right on Svechnikov's tape, and the Russian nearly scored on another backhand shot had it not been for Carey Price's diving save. But, Svechnikov corralled the rebound and put it in the open cage to tie the game, albeit for a very brief moment.

"Right now, I'm getting more confidence in every game," Svechnikov said.

"You can see the confidence coming," Slavin said. "He's a strong kid who skates really well. When he starts driving wide, you know something's going to happen."

"We did have a coming out party a little bit for Svech. ... He looked like he was trying to win the game for us. That's what we need more of," Brind'Amour said. "He's getting to be dynamic with the puck."

Three

Turnovers and unforced errors led to goals for Matthew Peca and Jeff Petry in the second period to put the Canadiens ahead, 2-1, heading into the third.

"Our D have to be better. Let's be honest," Brind'Amour said. "Holy moly. That's supposed to be the best part of our group."

Despite fighting back to tie the game with Svechnikov's goal in the third period, the Hurricanes couldn't get out of their own way.

On the very next shift, just 22 seconds later, Brendan Gallagher skated across the crease and scored to restore Montreal's two-goal advantage.

"When we get one, we've got to get right back on them," Slavin said. "It wasn't good enough for us."

Four



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Slavin made it interesting in the back half of the third period, when he stepped up with plenty of ice in front of him at the point and scored on a well-placed wrist shot to make it a one-goal game.

"Phil (Di Giuseppe) made a nice play to cut back and find me," Slavin explained. "I saw the open net and tried to put it there."

But again, the Canadiens would get it right back 93 seconds later, as Shea Weber fed Andrew Shaw in transition to make it 5-3.

Aho made a power move to cut to the net and score with 4:22 left in regulation, but an empty-net goal in the game's waning minutes sealed the victory for Montreal.

"We can't make mistakes like we're making right after scoring goals to tie things up. The guys we count on are making mistakes, and that's a big problem," Brind'Amour said. "We lost battles at real crucial times with guys who shouldn't be doing that."

Five

What to take out of a game like this? The positives: The Canes, despite a slow start and despite falling behind

multiple times, didn't quit, and they scored four goals on Price after being starved for offense recently.

"Hopefully we can take a little bit of scoring confidence," Slavin said. "As a whole team, we've just got to be better from start to finish."

Slavin's point is the kicker: The Canes didn't play a complete game, and it cost them, despite what they might have done well. So, what has to improve?

"The turnovers, number one. The puck's on your tape and suddenly it's on their tape. That can't happen," Brind'Amour said. "Just in general, we weren't competitive enough as a team to start the game. We got what we deserved, really. Yeah, we came back and played pretty good - or better. We looked like a team. But you can't win in the NHL with our group when you play a period of hockey. That's not going to happen."

Up Next

The Hurricanes will host the Washington Capitals on Friday night, the beginning of a five-game homestand heading into the three-day holiday break.



Canadiens hold off Hurricanes, fourth win in row for Price

Makes 27 saves; Petry scores twice

by Sean Farrell

Price's dazzling glove save

Brock McGinn looks to score off a turnover, but Carey Price flashes the leather for a superb save in the 2nd period

MONTREAL -- Carey Price made 27 saves to extend his winning streak to four games when the Montreal Canadiens defeated the Carolina Hurricanes 6-4 at Bell Centre on Thursday.

Brendan Gallagher scored 45 seconds into the third period to give Montreal a 3-2 lead, 22 seconds after Carolina rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov scored his second of the game to tie it 2-2.

"It's huge, obviously the game's all about momentum," Price said. "It seems it shifted both ways throughout the course of that third period."

Artturi Lehkonen, Andrew Shaw and Jeff Petry scored in the third for the Canadiens (16-11-5), who are 5-2-0 since a five-game losing streak.

"We knew this is an opportunity and a big homestand with the three games that we needed to kick it off with the game tonight," said Petry, whose second goal of the game, into an empty net, made it 6-4 with 1:59 remaining.

Jacob Slavin and Sebastian Aho scored in the third period for the Hurricanes (13-13-4), who are 1-4-1 in the past six games. Petr Mrazek made 34 saves.

"This is where I've got to be careful because I'm not happy and we needed much more out of certain guys and didn't have it tonight," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "So that's frustrating, especially after we fight to get back. You know, a terrible game, we're playing terrible, and then we dig and get back and then make just really bad decisions. And that's the frustrating part for me."

Lehkonen gave Montreal a 4-2 lead at 4:22 of the third, and Slavin scored at 10:51 to make it 4-3.

Shaw extended his point streak to six games for a 5-3 lead at 12:24. Aho got Carolina within 5-4 at 15:38.

Svechnikov gave Carolina a 1-0 lead when he cut past Canadiens defenseman Shea Weber and scored on a



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backhand at 2:53 of the first period. Matthew Peca tied it 1-1 with a wrist shot from the slot at 13:51. Petry gave the Canadiens a 2-1 lead at 16:59.

Svechnikov tied it 2-2 23 seconds into the third period.

"How we started was really frustrating," Brind'Amour said. "I don't get that one, so I've got to figure that out. But we did have a coming-out party a little bit for [Svechnikov] to me. He did have a mistake on the one goal, but he looked like he was trying to win the game for us and that's what we need more of."

They said it

"We just weren't taking care of the puck. Maybe in the third period we did a little bit better, but the first couple of periods we weren't really taking care of the puck and we weren't getting into our game, which is getting the puck behind their [defensemen] and working them down low. We didn't have a good forecheck going tonight." -- Hurricanes defenseman Jacob Slavin

"He's getting to be dynamic with the puck. He still has a lot of errors away from the puck, which is going to happen. You've got to remember he's 18 and we've got to live with that. But he shouldn't be our leader on the ice. That's something that

we've got to address. We've got older guys that need to step up, and unfortunately it didn't happen tonight." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour on forward Andrei Svechnikov

"I think we had a solid effort. I think we played pretty well. We kind of exchanged goals there at the end but we were able to get the win, and that's very important." -- Canadiens defenseman Jeff Petry

Need to know

Hurricanes defenseman Haydn Fleury left in the second period with an upper-body injury. ... Svechnikov, the No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, has eight goals, the fourth-most by an 18-year-old in Carolina/Hartford Whalers history. Jeff Skinner scored 31 for the Hurricanes, and Sylvain Turgeon had 21 and Ron Francis had 16 for the Whalers. ... Petry has five goals in the past six games. ... Shaw has six points (two goals, four assists) during his streak.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Washington Capitals on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET; FS-CR, NBCSWA, NHL.TV)

Canadiens: Host the Ottawa Senators on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; SN, TVAS, NHL.TV)



Petry, Price lead Canadiens to 6-4 win over Hurricanes

MONTREAL (AP) — The Montreal Canadiens showed their mettle after their worst performance of the season.

Jeff Petry scored twice as the Canadiens defeated the Carolina Hurricanes 6-4 on Thursday night.

Matthew Peca, Brendan Gallagher, Artturi Lehkonen and Andrew Shaw also scored for the Canadiens, who have won four of their last five games. Phillip Danault and Kenny Agostino each had two assists.

The Canadiens were coming off a season-worst 7-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday.

"We definitely knew we needed to bounce back after our effort in Minnesota and I thought we came out and played a pretty solid game," said Carey Price, who made 27 saves for his fourth straight victory.

"The game's all about momentum and it seemed like it shifted throughout the course of that third period."

Andrei Svechnikov had two goals, and Jacob Slavin and Sebastian Aho also scored for the Hurricanes. Petr Mrazek made 34 saves in place of injured Curtis McElhinney.

The teams combined for seven goals in a back-and-forth third period.

"It was a bit wild," Petry said. "Not the ideal way you want to approach a third period. Good to get the points here. Big game tonight to kick off a three-game homestand.

"We had a solid effort and played pretty well."

Down 2-1, Carolina tied it up 23 seconds into the third period. Svechnikov, with his second of the game, scored off his own rebound and notched the first multi-goal game of his NHL career.

Gallagher restored the one-goal lead 22 seconds later when he cut hard to the net and slid the puck between Mrazek's pads his 14th goal of the year. He is tied with Max Domi with 14 goals.

Lehkonen made it 4-2 at 4:22 before Slavin got one back for the Hurricanes at 10:51.

The Canadiens went up 5-3 when Shaw scored his ninth of the season on a breakaway at 12:24. That score was his ninth of the season and extended his points streak to six games.

"We have to stay right on them," Slavin said about conceding goals shortly after scoring. "We have to keep our foot on the gas. We can't take a breath. Roddy (coach Rod Brind'Amour) talks about that all the time. You can't take breaths right after you score."



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Carolina cut the deficit again when Aho beat Price with 4:22 remaining.

Petry sealed the win with an empty-net goal with 1:59 left. He has five goals in his last six games.

Svechnikov broke a scoreless deadlock with a 4-on-4 goal at 2:53 of the second period. With a burst of speed from center ice, Svechnikov blew past Shea Weber before backhanding the puck high into the net.

Peca, a healthy scratch for the last two games, tied the score with his second of the season and first goal since Nov. 8. Following a bad giveaway by Haydn Fleury in Carolina's zone, Peca spun around and fired a no-look shot over Mrazek's left shoulder at 13:51.

The Canadiens took the lead three minutes later when Petry, after a soft clearing attempt by the Hurricanes, skated into the slot and fired a wrist shot past Mrazek.

"This is where I have to be careful because I'm not happy," said Brind'Amour. "We needed much more out of certain guys and didn't get it tonight, so that's frustrating. Especially after we fought to get back."

NOTES: The game was the second of three meetings between the Canadiens and 'Canes this season. ... The Hurricanes lead the league in shots per game, but managed just four in a first period dominated by Montreal.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Home against Washington on Friday.

Canadiens: Home against Ottawa on Saturday



Did Svechnikov make big gains in Hurricanes' loss?

By James O'Brien

The Carolina Hurricanes are justified in their search for a top-six forward/sniper, but whenever a team goes shopping for a trade, they should also ask if they're taking advantage of the ingredients at hand.

That's a long way of saying that the Hurricanes possess at least one player who could score more goals for them: Andrei Svechnikov.

Looking at certain underlying numbers (as PHT did earlier in December), it seems fair to wonder if Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour should take the training wheels off of Svechnikov, and just let him fly. Yes, there are risks when it comes to really unleashing rookies – particularly in Svechnikov, who's made an immediate jump after being the second pick of the 2018 NHL Draft – but the rewards can often be worth it.

After all, this is a young man's game. Besides, Svechnikov frequently looks fully-grown on the ice, even this early in his NHL career.

Sometimes advanced stats don't slap you in the face like highlight-reel work, though. Svechnikov scored two goals in Carolina's 6-4 loss to the Montreal Canadiens, and his first one was absolutely gorgeous:

Might that demand Brind'Amour's attention? There's some reason to hope for even more.

"We did have a coming out party, for me, out of Svechnikov," Brind'Amour said, via Sara Civian of The Athletic.

It's not like Svechnikov is getting totally buried in the Hurricanes' lineup, yet here's a pushy request: just keep ramping up his minutes and opportunities, seeing how much he can handle. Carolina needs goals, and maybe they'd get more with more Svechnikov, risks and all. Brind'Amour could even do so selectively, by handing him more reps on the power play, preferably on a top unit that hasn't exactly been lightning the world on fire, based on full-season stats.

As of Thursday night, the Canadiens are where the Hurricanes want to be (comfortably in a playoff spot), while Carolina's sitting in Montreal's expected position (searching for answers, seven points out of the wild card). You can chalk that up to a lot of things – Carey Price has now won four games in a row – but it's worth noting that the Canadiens are embracing speedy and/or skilled young players like Jonathan Drouin and Max Domi, while shrugging their shoulders and just letting Jesperi Kotkaniemi play. There are quite a few stories of immediate successes this season, with Elias Pettersson and top 2018 pick Rasmus Dahlin also coming to mind.

So why not see what Svechnikov can do? For all we know, rolling the dice might just help the Hurricanes break out of this frustrating funk.



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Capitals, red-hot Ovechkin visit Hurricanes

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Things are going so well for the Washington Capitals that perhaps veteran center Alex Ovechkin has even improved.

by STATS

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Things are going so well for the Washington Capitals that perhaps veteran center Alex Ovechkin has even improved.

That's probably about the last thing the Carolina Hurricanes need to hear in advance of Friday night's game at PNC Arena.

The Capitals produced a 6-2 home victory Tuesday night against the Detroit Red Wings, buoyed by Ovechkin's hat trick that extended his point streak to 12 games.

"He's having a great start to the year," Capitals coach Todd Reirden said. "In particular, it has been his 5-on-5 play and converting on his chances. He's earning it and he's doing the things the right way and he's being a great leader for us so far this year."

With an 18-9-3 record, Washington carries a three-game winning streak during which it has outscored opponents 14-4. Ovechkin has been at the core of this robust stretch.

"I know some other year statistically have been better," Reirden said. "But for me, it's the best two-way hockey he has played. A lot of credit to him for what he has done."

It hasn't been nearly as rosy recently for the Hurricanes, who are 1-4-1 in their last six games. They're coming off Thursday night's 6-4 loss at Montreal.

For Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour, it's a matter of staying the course and following the blueprint regardless of the most-recent outcome. He doesn't want one game to overly impact the next.

"I don't really think coming off one game on a game or another, you really should really approach it different," Brind'Amour said.

Washington, though, has found numerous sources that it wants to keep tapping. The Capitals are proud that the fourth line of Nic Dowd, Travis Boyd and Dmitrij Jaskin has produced 12 points across the team's first five games in December.

"If you can get production from that fourth line, you can be a very difficult team to match up against," Reirden said.

One of the questions for the Capitals entering the season was how much offense would be produced from the lines other than the top line.

"A lot of chemistry and they're playing well and nice to see them get rewarded," Reirden said. "I like that element that we can add to our team right now."

Since Tuesday, Washington defenseman Christian Djoos has missed practice with a lower-body injury and is considered day-to-day.

The Carolina roster has been adjusted with the promotion of forward Janne Kuokkanen, who made his NHL season debut Thursday night.

"Young guys coming up, you don't want to give them too much and get them overloaded," Brind'Amour said. "You just want to let them play and turn them loose."

Kuokkanen, 20, replaced center Jordan Staal, who was placed on injured reserve retroactive to Dec. 5 because of a concussion. It had been more than a year since Kuokkanen's NHL debut in October 2017.

The Hurricanes could be in line for another move after defenseman Haydn Fleury departed Thursday night's game with an upper-body injury and didn't return.

This is the first of four meetings this season with the next encounter coming in less than two weeks at Washington.



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YAHOO! SPORTS

All Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon wants is that sweet, sweet offence

Steven Psihogios

Carolina Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon knows how to bring the fun. (Getty)

Remember that old saying, “offence wins games, but defence wins championships?”

Yeah, well, that take hasn’t aged very well when it comes to the National Hockey League.

In the Eastern Conference, the formula seems pretty simple. If you want to be good, you have to score goals. The top three teams, the Tampa Bay Lightning, Toronto Maple Leafs, and Washington Capitals also rank first, second, and third in goals for.

And then you have the Carolina Hurricanes. The club has had mixed results to start the year, but their 72 goals rank last in the conference.

In the spirit of making the NHL fun again, team owner Tom Dundon has made it clear that this trend will not continue if he has his way.

“I’ve got to have more offence, I want to lose 5-4, not 2-1,” he told the Triangle Business Journal. “If we lose 5-4, I’ll at least have fun.”

“We won’t be drafting defence in the first round as long as I’m here,” he said.

Those comments are pretty interesting considering the organization traded both Elias Lindholm and Jeff Skinner in Dundon’s first off-season at the helm. Those two have combined for 38 goals during the 2018-19 season, in other words, more than half of what the entire Hurricanes roster has produced in that same span.

Credit where credit is due, though. Dundon is a man committed to having a good time. And despite the club’s inability to light the lamp so far, they have been able to capture the attention of fans with their must-watch post-win celebrations.

What says “fun” more than hockey players pretending to be dominoes? Classic.

I don’t know how long it will take for the Hurricanes to turn it around and become one of the NHL’s elite teams, but under Dundon’s control, it sounds like they’ll have a good time — even if it takes a long time.

TRIANGLE
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Carolina Hurricanes owner Dundon talks hockey, business and why he hates losing

By Lauren K. Ohnesorge – Senior Staff Writer, Triangle Business Journal

Carolina Hurricanes majority stakeholder Tom Dundon wants a downtown arena. And he’s not afraid to say it. He just doesn’t want to pay for it.

“For private capital, none of you would put your private capital, I don’t think, into an arena,” he told the executive-heavy crowd at Triangle Business Journal’s Power Breakfast, held at PNC Arena early Wednesday.

And he hates losing.

“If I sell, it’s going to be because we’re losing and I can’t take it,” he says. “If I ever sell the team it won’t be financially motivated it will 100 percent because I literally can’t take it anymore ... I’ve never lost like this before.”

During an early morning Power Breakfast, Dundon, the Dallas investor who acquired the majority stake (61 percent)

in the team in January for \$420 million, talked up the Hurricanes’ potential – both for the playoffs and as a business opportunity for the state – sharing business advice along the way.

Humble upbringing

Dundon was born in New York but was brought up in Texas – the son of a restaurant manager. While he played baseball and soccer growing up, athleticism wasn’t in his future.

“Everybody grew and I never grew,” he jokes. He applied to Southern Methodist University after attending a “party there,” working his way through school by refereeing basketball games and waiting tables. When he graduated with an economics degree and more than \$60,000 in student loans in 1993, “no one would hire me.”

“I had a wall full of rejection letters,” he says. After a failed restaurant endeavor, he teamed up with college friends starting a consultancy. For experience, they were working at



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a car dealership – and it was there that the entrepreneurship itch was realized. Dundon figured out the complex formulas behind subprime loans and, “all of a sudden I was pretty popular.”

Soon, his dealership was capitalizing so many loans that it led to financing deals, and ultimately a company. By 1998, “we were making a little bit of money.” And it meant bigger partnerships.

“We never had a plan, and when we got Bank of Scotland as a partner ... they brought in risk management, internal audit and I fought every single one of these people every step of the way. I felt like I knew what I was doing ... in hindsight it was the best thing that ever happened,” he says. “Whatever makes you a good entrepreneur, sometimes it’s that stubbornness ... I wanted to do it my way but I was just poor enough that I had to listen.”

In business, as in life, he says he follows a straight line – for the most part.

“I’m a rule follower probably by nature,” he says, noting that “it probably costs me some times, because I think things have to be done in a certain way. But if there is any debate in what the rules are, I’ll probably push it as far as I can, whether it’s taxes or other things I can do.”

He says he’s not a “give-a-hug kind of guy,” but likes to surround himself with self-driven “winners.” He expects people to work hard.

On Hurricanes’ performance

“The results are worse than we probably would have expected, so yeah, it’s not very good,” he says. “(Canes General manager) Don (Waddell) told me to be positive, but I can’t when I lose.”

He says the team is good enough to win, “but we’re not good enough to be great yet.”

“We can win because the difference is so small, but we’re not as good as what I think we can be, but if you try to do it fast you’ll be bad and I want to be good for a long time,” he says.

He says the Hurricanes will focus on offense and skill. Defense can be bought, he says. “We won’t be drafting defense in the first round as long as I’m here,” he adds, noting the Hurricanes are now in the market for a “sniper.”

“I’ve got to have more offense, I want to lose five to four, not two to one,” he says. “If we lose five to four, I’ll at least have fun.”

The Hurricanes face another challenge off the ice, too, as it’s the 29th team in the league in terms of attendance. “We don’t win very much, that’s probably part of it,” Dundon says. “We think the arena needs to be upgraded the team needs to be upgraded.”

But he says that, “until we win,” it will be hard to tackle the attendance problem.

On the team’s future in Raleigh

Dundon acknowledges the hockey team is entering a critical stage of negotiations with the Centennial Authority, the governing body of the PNC Arena, over a long-term lease deal. The current lease expires in 2024.

“My son’s going to go to (University of North) Carolina so I’m hoping to get to be here with him when he does that so the plan is to figure out a way to get the arena redone,” he says, noting it’s an effort that would likely cost \$200 million.

“There’s a different standard now that the NHL wants that the fans obviously want ... the focus is, how do we work with the Centennial Authority and the state and figure out how do we end up in a situation where the team can have success?”

Dundon says leaving Raleigh isn’t an option. “I’ve never talked to any other markets about what’s out there,” he says. “But we have a challenge, which is: we’re not downtown – and there’s not a list of successful nondowntown arenas.”

If there’s a possibility of a stadium downtown, “I’m in,” he adds.

“I’d be happy to put up the money to put up an environment, create a community, but here it is tough,” he says, motioning to the location of the current arena. When asked if he’d step up to finance a new arena with his personal coffers, he says “I’d probably do the development around the arena.”

“I don’t want to own an arena in Raleigh,” Dundon added. “That’s a lot worse deal than owning a hockey team.”

He sees an arena as more of a public effort, as government entities can benefit from the tax revenues it could bring. “I’m pretty rational with my capital except for my hockey team,” he says. “Capital is not my issue, I just don’t want to burn it.”

If investments don’t step up for an improved arena, he says he hasn’t thought about what happens next. “You have to have an NHL-quality arena to have an NHL-quality team. I subsidize the team right now ... and I’m OK with it ... It’s just how much and how long?”

Dundon says losing about \$10 million on the team every year may be his limit. He envisions losing \$15 million, “maybe \$20 million” this year. But he says he’s not in it for the money.

“Poor was fine for me,” he says. “Ramen noodles and Taco Bell, I loved it. I was happy then and I am happy now. I don’t see a scenario where I’m trying to make money off this city. It’s the exact opposite. I’m trying to figure out, how much will I subsidize? When is it irresponsible to be here?”

And the Hurricanes aren’t Dundon’s only investment with a Raleigh overlap.

Dundon’s other endeavors include golf retailer Top Golf, which he says is already eyeing another location in the Triangle. And he says he’s interested in helping the effort to bring a Major League Soccer team to Raleigh. He says he’s been in talks with MLS about investing his own cash, and they keep trying to get him to invest in other markets – something he’s ruled out. He says MLS watches what happens with the Hurricanes as it makes its decisions.

“We try to make the point, don’t blame soccer for our failures,” he says. “I think it’s possible. But I don’t think we’re next on their list, from what I understand.”



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The Hockey News

Goals Wanted: Hurricanes' dreadful attack stands in way of ending playoff drought

Carolina has been all process and no results. Despite dominant possession numbers, the Hurricanes have a popgun offense that has cost them a number of winnable games. It's time to change that.

By Jared Clinton

The Carolina Hurricanes have only one player, Micheal Ferland, with a double-digit goal total. He's also the only Hurricane with nine or more goals. For context, every other team in the NHL has at least two nine-plus goal scorers. The Tampa Bay Lightning have six. Four other teams have five. More than half the league has at least four. Yet, the Hurricanes have one, Ferland, with Sebastian Aho second in scoring with eight tallies to his name.

Suffice to say, Carolina has scoring issues.

Entering action Thursday, on a night the Hurricanes visit the Montreal Canadiens, Carolina has the league's second-least effective attack. At a paltry 2.45 goals per game, a rate better than only the offensively inept Los Angeles Kings, the Hurricanes are on pace to score just 200 goals this season. That's 28 fewer than last season and 15 fewer than the season before that. And given a rise in scoring that amounts to one-third of a goal per game compared to the 2016-17 campaign, the Hurricanes' scoring woes are troubling, to say the least.

While undoubtedly true that few expected Carolina to boast an offense among the league's best this season, it would have been impossible to expect the attack to fall as flat as it has through the first third of the campaign. But the extent to which the Hurricanes' offense is struggling borders on spectacular, because though the Kings have scored fewer goals — and fewer goals per game — than the Hurricanes, there's no team that has shown an inability to finish as great as Carolina. Nothing illustrates that quite like the Hurricanes' almost absurdly low shooting percentages.

Through 29 games, the Hurricanes' shooting success at 5-on-5 is a mere 5.2 percent. That's dead-last in the NHL by a margin of 1.1 percent. And at all strengths, Carolina's shooting percentage has been only marginally better. However, at 6.4 percent, the Hurricanes remain last in the NHL and 1.3 percent behind Los Angeles' lowly attack. To give this all some historical context, if Carolina's shooting percentages remain as low as they are entering Thursday's action, the Hurricanes would own the league's worst 5-on-5 and all strengths rates of the past decade by more than half a percent.

Worst of all, Carolina playing its way out of this seems increasingly unlikely. When the Hurricanes made a change behind the bench in the off-season, prompted by Bill Peters exercising his out-clause in Carolina to step into the vacant job behind the Calgary Flames' bench, the hope — and

some would say belief — was that Rod Brind'Amour would be able to push the offensive aspects of the game on his group. Seasons with 5-on-5 shooting percentages of 6.2 percent, 6.9 percent, 7 percent and 7.4 percent had left some feeling that Peters' style of play was part of the problem, that while conducive to great possession numbers but not high-scoring hockey.

It's remarkable how wrong that belief has been proven, though. True to form in Calgary, Peters' Flames have been a dominant possession team that overwhelms opponents, but the group is also shooting 8.1 percent at five-a-side and 10.8 percent at all strengths. Top talents such as Johnny Gaudreau, Sean Monahan and especially Matthew Tkachuk have flourished. There's not even a whisper of goal-scoring concerns. Quite the opposite, really. And that has served only to amplify the already neon-lit sign on the outside of PNC Arena that reads, "Goal Scorers Wanted."

The cruel irony here, of course, is that the one player who would have been far-and-away the Hurricanes best and most lethal goal scorer this season, Jeff Skinner, finds himself on the Eastern Conference rival Buffalo Sabres. He's nearly lapped Ferland in goal production — Skinner's 21 goals put him one shy of doubling the 11 scored by the Hurricanes' off-season addition — and Skinner is picking corners like he's Robin Hood. He's shooting 23.1 percent, and while that's vastly higher than his career average, one has to imagine that Carolina fans wish they could have a mulligan on that one right about now. (It's also painful that the one year Carolina's goaltending is actually somewhat reliable — tied for 18th with a .900 SP at all strengths — it's the offense that isn't getting the job done.)

This doesn't have to continue for the Hurricanes, though, and depending how aggressive Carolina GM Don Waddell is willing to get, there could very well be options out there to help improve this offense. Among those on expiring contracts with unrestricted free agency on the horizon are Artemi Panarin, Mark Stone, Matt Duchene, Eric Staal, Wayne Simmonds and Jakob Silfverberg, while rumors have been about players such as Phil Kessel and Charlie Coyle.

Far-fetched as landing any of the biggest names on that list or chasing a top talent on the trade market may seem, don't go thinking the Hurricanes' front office wouldn't be willing to take the bat off its collective shoulders and swing hard if a potential top-six, goal-scoring talent became available. Throughout the William Nylander saga in Toronto, the Hurricanes were connected to the Maple Leafs and Carolina was considered a potential frontrunner if push came to shove and Nylander was moved along. It's been made clear, too, that Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon wants his management group to add offensive punch.

Carolina has pieces that could help facilitate such an acquisition, as well. The defense corps is incredibly rich,



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arguably one of the league's finest. Dougie Hamilton, Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce, Justin Faulk and Calvin de Haan would be a fit and an upgrade on near any team in the NHL. The prospect pool is also one of the deepest in the NHL, which means moving along a few high picks in a trade that brings in a top-tier scoring talent could be a worthwhile proposition.

No matter how the Hurricanes go about it, though, it's becoming abundantly clear that Carolina won't be able to take any significant steps forward — let alone snap their near decade-long playoff drought — without addressing the need for a player who can score with some semblance of consistency.



Metropolitan Division Weekly Roundup: Caps Soar, Everyone Else Struggles

The Washington Capitals are the only team in the division with more than five wins in their last 10 games.

By Zeke Lukow

1. Washington Capitals: 39 Points (18-9-3)

With a hat-trick in the 6-2 dismantling of the Detroit Red Wings, Alex Ovechkin has moved back into first place in scoring in the league with 25 goals in 30 games. The most fun goal of the night was Ovechkin's first. He took a shot that was so wide it had no hope of going in, in fact it was more likely to hit the corner than the net. However, Gustav Nyquist was in the way and the puck ricocheted off of him and into the net. That proves that it's better to be lucky than good, even though he is both.

The league will need to be on notice because Tom Wilson has returned to practice after suffering a concussion. I can only imagine his revenge tour will only be worse than his normal play. In other injury news the Caps also got T.J. Oshie and Evgeny Kuznetsov back from injuries. No big deal but in their last game they combined for a goal and two assists, so good luck everyone else in the East.

2. Columbus Blue Jackets: 34 Points (16-12-2)

Everyone has had their eye on the Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin contract negotiations since the offseason. I have touched on this a couple of times already this season. Yesterday on NHL Network's On the Fly Kevin Weekes, who shares an agent with Bobrovsky, gave some insight into the talks between Bobrovsky and the Jackets. He said the situation is becoming "untenable" and the relationship has deteriorated. Every day it seems that this is getting worse on and off the ice and that a trade will be in the future.

Since losing 9-6 to the Calgary Flames the Blue Jackets have dropped two out of their last three games giving up at least three goals in each game. You have to go back to November 19th to find a game in which they gave up fewer than three goals. With the defensive woes continuing John Tortorella switched his assistant coaches' duties back to their original roles from previous seasons. The hope is that the changed voices will be able to get more out of the players to shape up their defense from top to bottom.

3. New York Islanders: 32 Points (14-12-4)

With Anders Lee and Tom Kuhnhackl injured, Lou Lamoriello called up Josh Ho-Sang from Bridgeport. Despite a new coaching team in Long Island, it is still more of the same for Ho-Sang. Barry Trotz said that he felt zero pressure to put him in the lineup, saying "You can't go in going 'I've got to get this guy into the lineup' because, what? He's got two goals in the AHL? Or he's a prospect, or where he was drafted? We don't work that way. This is about winning hockey games."

The quote is specifically harsh because it really hammers home that Ho-Sang isn't having a great year in the AHL. The funny thing is that the Islanders lost their game Monday in a five-round shootout to a division rival in Pittsburgh. It just seems like a situation that you could use a skilled winger for. But then again this is still the NHL, where speaking out about your organization or addressing your frustrations sets you back for years.

4. Pittsburgh Penguins: 32 Points (13-11-6)

Yesterday, the Penguins activated starting goaltender Matt Murray from injured reserve. Despite practicing on Tuesday, the Penguins decided to start Casey DeSmith for the sixth straight game against the Blackhawks last night. Murray was originally injured on Thanksgiving when he suffered a lower-body-injury. Goaltender Tristan Jarry has been sent back to Wilkes-Barre to make room for Murray.

Despite the Blackhawks having Patrick Kane, they have been struggling and it seems like that would have been a good game to get him back up to speed. It appears that the Penguins are happy to give him more practice time and allow him to serve as a backup while getting back up to speed. The target date for his next start is likely on Saturday against the Kings. While it will be on the back half of a back-to-back, it makes more sense than throwing him in against a dangerous Boston team who has won their last three games by a combined score of 12-7.

5. New York Rangers: 31 Points (14-13-3)

The Rangers seem to be a great trade fit with the Canes except for one thing: they are within the division. The Rangers have a couple of top six players that they would be willing to part with, and they are a disaster on the blue line. The Rangers could part with Mika Zibanejad, Jesper Fast, Vladislav Namestnikov, Pavel Buchnevich, or Kevin Hayes. I



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laid out in a post a couple of weeks ago why I don't think Hayes will be moved, so I would remove him from the trade list.

Zibanejad is probably too much return for Justin Faulk on a one for one, but if the Canes also included a pick it could work. It is important to note the Canes are filled to the brim with contracts so they need to decide on which prospects are keepers and move on from some or trade picks. Vladislav Namestnikov on a contract year as an RFA could also be intriguing as an option on the wing, which could bump someone like Warren Foegele out of a top-six position - which at this point is probably needed to help scoring. It's a bit of a gamble but the Canes need offense and his ability to score 20 goals would help.

6. Carolina Hurricanes: 30 Points (13-12-4)

Sara Civian at The Athletic wrote a great piece about Adam Fox, the defenseman who came over in the trade with the Calgary Flames this offseason. What is interesting is that the Hurricanes look to be able to sign the defenseman. Directly after the trade it seemed like he was unlikely to sign and that is why he was part of the deal. He looked to go the way of fellow Harvard player Jimmy Vesey to hit free agency and pick his own team.

Fox is averaging 1.89 points per game with Harvard, and wants to come to the NHL as soon as possible, which means he could join the team as early as this year after Harvard's season is over. This puts even more pressure on the Hurricanes to trade a current rostered defenseman to make room for Fox. Jaccob Slavin and Dougie Hamilton are likely untouchable on trades, one for performance and one based on his contract, and with Calvin de Haan just signing this year it is unlikely he would be moved.

This leaves the only trade options as Justin Faulk and Brett Pesce. One or both players could be on the move, and Faulk seems the most likely. If you are willing to take an offensive defenseman with defensive issues, you might as well do it with a player that is six years younger. Faulk can also still pull in a huge return. If the Canes could get a top six forward immediately that would benefit both parties involved.

Recap: Svechnikov Shows Off, but Habs Hold Strong at Home

The rookie nets two goals to get the Canes going, but the Canadiens find consistent answers.

By Jake Crouse

The Hurricanes came to Montreal hungry for a win fresh off a snoozer against the Maple Leafs at home. However, as the Canes kept inching their way back into the game, the Canadiens quickly found answers and held on for an 6-4 win.

The first period was a struggle for Carolina. Even with the home reds, the Canes couldn't get red hot, going more than ten minutes without a shot to begin the game. The Canadiens, meanwhile, came out shooting, and Petr Mrazek made some great saves to keep them off the board, going 12-for-12.

Let's just put that effort behind us, shall we?

7. Philadelphia Flyers: 28 Points (12-13-4)

Heading into their Western Canada road trip Dave Hakstol split up Sean Couturier and Claude Giroux. The two have been playing on the same line since the 2016-2017 season and have combined for 21 goals and 35 assists so far this season. Despite a rough 7-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets, the lines settled in against the Flames. Giroux had two helpers on the top line while Couturier registered a goal and an assist on the second line.

Shuffling the lineup and even breaking up the top line isn't out of the ordinary for Hakstol. He is a big believer in breaking up successful groups to spread out scoring across multiple lines. He did the same thing last season when he broke up his top line moving Jakub Voracek to the second line. Last season he shuffled them in early December which ended up sparking the Flyers to a six game win streak including sweeping a Western Canada road trip.

8. New Jersey Devils: 26 Points (10-13-6)

I know I have been focusing on Cory Schneider a lot lately but get this. His last win came on December 27th, 2017. He is now close to nearing an entire year without earning a win. He has a 0-15-3 record in his last 18 starts, and honestly, I don't know what you can do with a goalie that is playing that poorly in a stretch like that. This is more than a standard case of the yips, and the Devils desperately need to find away to get a win out of the goalie making \$6 million per year. If this was any larger market of a team, this story would be everywhere.

In other news General Manager Ray Shero acknowledged where his team is in the rebuild and said that they would stay the course to rebuild the right way. This is great news for Devils fans because it shows that ownership and management are on the same page. Last year they overperformed, but this shows that they acknowledge that as opposed to thinking that was the new status of the team. This is in stark contrast to the Philadelphia Flyers who thought their rebuild was over and have fired their GM.

Because the second period started with a dash of "what we've been waiting for" from Andrei Svechnikov. Jumping off the bench, Svechnikov gave an immediate stick tap and received the puck, speeding past two Canadiens defenders and moving left to right at the crease to net a top-shelf goal.

Montreal got one back late in the period, when Matthew Peca put a shot shielded by Haydn Fleury past the glove of Mrazek. The puck found a way off the skate of Michael Chaput back to Peca, who flung it from the right circle to bring the score to 1-1.

Fleury left the ice soon after the goal with an upper-body injury, and the Canes operated with five defensemen through the end of the game.

Also out for the game: Jordan Staal. He's a top penalty killer, and as fellow penalty killer Justin Faulk was called for two



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penalties in a five-minute span during the second period, the Canes had their hands full trying to shut down the Canadiens' power play. A trip called on Paul Byron helped the Canes for a few seconds on the first, but Svechnikov was quickly called for hooking on Jeff Petry.

However, Mrazek came up big time and time again, and the reinforcements held strong to keep Montreal off the board on the man advantages.

Justin Williams nearly gave the Canes the edge with just over three minutes left in the second period with a breakaway chance that he shot off the foot of Price. He got the puck back in front of the crease for another chance but, sensing trailing teammates, he held off on a quick shot and fed it back to Clark Bishop, who couldn't corral the puck.

Seconds later, Petry did what the Canes were unable to, breaking the ice with another goal from right circle. Faulk turned over the puck to Max Domi after having plenty of time to clear, and Domi found Petry to put Montreal up, 2-1, headed to the third ... which, again, began fast.

Twenty-three seconds into the period, Svechnikov said he's not finished. Lucas Wallmark forced a turnover on the boards in the opening seconds, then Williams fed Svechnikov from behind the crease. The rookie knocked one off Price that trickled gloveside, then he quickly collected and fired from a sharp angle into a yawning net for a 2-2 game.

But 22 seconds later, Brendan Gallagher turned the score back in favor of Montreal, peeling off from the defense of Jaccob Slavin to receive a pass from Phillip Danault and poke the puck through Mrazek's five hole.

Whatever confidence Svechnikov had tried to build was vanquished further minutes later by Arturri Lehkonen. He galloped down the right side of the ice past Calvin de Haan, and Faulk gave late support, allowing the Hab to reach past Mrazek then drag the puck back into the net for a 4-2 lead.

Svechnikov nearly had a hat trick with a shot from close range midway through the final period, but minutes later, Jaccob Slavin cashed in on an unshielded wrist that just whizzed by Price's blocker side, cutting the score to 4-3.

But shortly thereafter, Andrew Shaw was the beneficiary of a Hurricanes defensive breakdown as he skated past Svechnikov to go mano a mano with Mrazek, beating the goalie low to the gloveside and giving the Habs a two-goal lead.

By this point, you should realize another goal was coming. Just scoring galore -- enjoy it while it lasts, folks.

Sebastian Aho slapped the back of the net with a puck after some personal shooting woes to give the Hurricanes late life. Teuvo Teravainen dished a nice, almost no-look pass to find Aho, and from there, it was all No. 20's speed to draw Price from right to left and sling it by.

The Canes went to six men shortly after, but Petry once again killed hope, scoring a toppling, turning empty net goal with 1:59 to pay to give the final score.

A high point in the loss: despite missing a top penalty killer, the Canes' penalty kill shutout the Habs on six power play chances.

Mrazek went 34-for-39 in net, and the Canes were outshot 40-31. They'll get back to it on Friday against the Capitals at home.



Nedeljkovic, Booth Combine for 1-0 Shutout of Hartford

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers' return to Bojangles' Coliseum was a low-scoring affair, but the home team emerged victorious by a 1-0 score thanks to a joint shutout effort.

Alex Nedeljkovic started the game for Charlotte and stopped all 17 shots he was faced with through 40 minutes of play before Callum Booth took over for the third frame. For the final 20 minutes the second-year netminder denied all six shots he saw down the stretch.

The lone offensive breakthrough came via Dennis Robertson, who jumped into the play early on in the second

and ripped a shot past Hartford's goaltender for his third tally of the season.

That would prove to be all the Checkers needed to snag another victory, their fourth straight overall.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the game

I thought we played really good for two periods. I didn't like our third period – I thought we were a little loose with the puck. All their chances were on our turnovers. I kept talking to the guys about it but we need to tighten that up in the third. You've got to learn to win those low-scoring games,



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and we didn't give them that much.

Vellucci on Dennis Robertson's goal

The joke was that we didn't know we were ever going to hear the song he picked out for when he scored a goal. It was a great shot. There wasn't much room because their goalie played really well. He put it bar down and it was a big lift for us.

Vellucci on switching goaltenders after the second period
I had gotten a call from Carolina that (Nedeljkovic) is possibly playing tomorrow night and they didn't want him to play back-to-backs, so we pulled him. We felt very comfortable with Ned in the goal but Booth has been good this year and he played an excellent third period.

Vellucci on Callum Booth entering the game
I thought they pushed hard and they answered really well. He was put in a very difficult situation and he answered the bell. He's got a lot of confidence, and part of it is that we sent him down to the east coast, he played a bunch of games, he got a bunch of wins and he got his legs under him again.

Dennis Robertson on the game
It's huge. That whole first period and most of the second we were all over him but couldn't solve him. Lots of times you just need one to get the confidence going and keep rolling. We took it to them in the first half and let off a little bit at the end, but it was good to get that one at least.

Robertson on Booth entering the game
He played fantastic coming in cold like that. Sometimes when they're pressing and down one they're going to throw everything at him, so we tried our best to keep things to the outside and not give them any grade-A chances.

Robertson on scoring the first goal since players picked their own goal songs
The odds wouldn't have been on me for that first song, but I'll

take it. It sounded good.

Callum Booth on entering the game after two periods
You can't complain about any ice time you get. You prepare every game like you're starting and you've got to be ready for that. It's a testament to how good of a group of guys are in there that they were able to switch goalies like that and perform that way in front of me. I'm super grateful.

Booth on going back and forth between the Checkers and the ECHL in recent weeks
I think you've just got to take it as it comes. You're given an opportunity and you've just got to do your best to seize it. I'm just taking it one game at a time and trying to work my bag off every time I get the chance and see where that takes me.

NOTES

The Checkers extended their win streak to four games, which trails a pair of earlier five-game streaks for their longest of the season ... Charlotte has won a season-high four straight at Bojangles' Coliseum ... This was the Checkers' first shutout since Feb. 18 of last season and first in team history that was not credited to a single goaltender ... Nedeljkovic did receive credit for the win, allowing him to regain sole possession of the AHL lead with 13 on the season ... The Checkers improved to 5-11-3-12 all-time when scoring one or fewer goals ... Charlotte went a perfect 5-for-5 on the penalty kill ... Robertson scored his third goal of the season and first since scoring twice on Oct. 12 ... This was the third meeting between Charlotte and Hartford this month. The Checkers are 2-1-0 thus far ... Defenseman Josiah Didier missed the game due to injury ... Forward Zack Stortini and defenseman Josh Wesley were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The Checkers' home stand continues with a Saturday rematch with Hartford. The 6 p.m. game also marks the team's annual Teddy Bear Toss.

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2018

SportScan

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

1120967 Washington Capitals

Andre Burakovsky's future with Capitals gets more complicated with every healthy scratch

By Isabelle Khurshudyan December 13

It was more than 30 minutes into the Washington Capitals' practice when forward Andre Burakovsky was again relegated from participant to observer. The team ran through its line rushes, a preview of the next game's likely lineup, while Burakovsky stood off to the side and watched as 12 other forwards took their turn on the ice. There wasn't a place for him once again, and he is expected to be scratched for a second straight game.

Washington's oft-injured lineup is getting healthier, and if right wing Tom Wilson plays Friday night against the Carolina Hurricanes after missing three games with a concussion, the team will have its entire forward corps available for just the third time this season. That Burakovsky isn't currently considered one of the team's top 12 forwards when everyone is healthy is telling, and this being a contract year the possible ramifications are obvious and don't need explaining to him.

"I'm not worried about my future," Burakovsky said. "I know what I can do out there. I think I've proven what I can do, and sometimes you just have to battle a little bit harder than you wanted to. That's going to happen. Right now, it's kind of what I'm doing, and I'm just going to be positive about this and learn from it and come back strong."

Here is the Capitals' conundrum with Burakovsky: he's due to become a restricted free agent at the end of this season, so to retain his negotiating rights, Washington would have to tender him a qualifying offer, at minimum matching his current salary of \$3.25 million. But with how Burakovsky's production has steadily declined over the past three seasons, the team might not want to continue paying him that much,

If the Capitals don't qualify him, he can become an unrestricted free agent July 1, which could leave Washington losing an asset that was the organization's 2013 first-round pick, for nothing in return. General Manager Brian MacLellan could choose to trade Burakovsky before the late February deadline, but he'd be selling low with any potential return on a fast, skilled young forward not expected to be impressive.

[Andre Burakovsky hopes new mental approach can breathe life into his game]

Maybe what's even more frustrating for Washington is that it's seen what Burakovsky could be, and quitting on that isn't an easy call when he's still just 23, especially considering the organization is lacking high-end forward talent in its prospect ranks. Burakovsky scored two goals in Game 7 against the Tampa Bay Lightning in the Eastern Conference finals, a performance that helped put the Capitals in a position to win a franchise-first Stanley Cup.

Just three seasons ago, Burakovsky scored 12 goals with eight assists in 26 games from January through March to finish the year with 17 goals and 21 assists, his best season since he made his debut as a 19-year-old. The next year, he played 15 fewer games because of a broken right hand, his production dipping slightly as a result, and Washington signed him to a two-year, \$6 million deal, confident that Burakovsky's year was just hampered by the injury. The belief then was he would continue to establish himself as part of the organization's future, perhaps warranting a long-term contract once that bridge deal was finished.

But Burakovsky broke his left thumb last season, and he played in fewer games and scored fewer points again. The flashes of obvious talent come less frequently now, even as Burakovsky, to his credit, has been working with a mental coach in search of more consistency in his attitude and play. After Wilson got hurt last week, Burakovsky was promoted to the top line beside center Nicklas Backstrom and captain Alex Ovechkin. In his first game there, Burakovsky acknowledged he played poorly, but his performance was redeemed by scoring the game-winning goal against the Arizona Coyotes. He remained in that first-line right wing spot against the Columbus Blue Jackets, but after he took two penalties in the third period, Burakovsky was a healthy scratch before Washington's game against the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday.

"Other players had taken more advantage of the opportunity than he had recently," Coach Todd Reirden said that morning. "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."

T.J. Oshie's return from a concussion was what pushed Burakovsky out of the lineup against Detroit, and now that Wilson is expected to return Friday, Burakovsky's climb back into it has gotten steeper. Winger Chandler Stephenson is also expected to be a healthy scratch, and while he's scored fewer points than Burakovsky this season, Stephenson plays on the penalty kill. Burakovsky, on the other hand, doesn't usually play on any special teams.

Averaging 0.28 points per game this season, Burakovsky is on pace for his worst season, well behind the 0.42 points per game he had as a rookie, when he finished with nine goals and 13 assists in 53 games.

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

"He's still a young player," Reirden said. "We've had him here for a while, so we think he's older than he is. He's still in a process of trying to really solidify himself as a full-time NHLer that can score at the rate he hopes and we envision him scoring at here as well."

The issue is that this has become an annual story line with Burakovsky. He's had numerous rough patches followed by healthy scratches in each of his five seasons, and it's under two different coaches now. He scored with relative ease in Sweden's professional league and then playing alongside now-Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid in the Ontario Hockey League before getting drafted. He's had to adjust his expectations in the NHL, and as he rates his own performance after



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every game, he's focused more on his overall play rather than just if he tallied a point. Scoring slumps used to cause other areas of his game to deteriorate, so he's pledged to be more mindful of the little things and his play away from the puck.

Of course he's frustrated, too, but beating himself up over his own game made things worse in the past, so Burakovsky has instead opted for optimism while others are starting to question how much longer he'll be in Washington.

"You can always do more, but I think my game has been pretty positive from my side," he said. "I don't think there's anything in particular that I'm going to really change. I think guys on the team have been playing really well and deserve to play, and they've done a little bit more than maybe I have in the past now. We've been winning, so that's the most important thing. When I get the chance, I'm just going to go in and do my thing, play my game."

Washington Post LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120968 Washington Capitals

Capitals prospect report: Alex Alexeyev reportedly taken to hospital after dangerous hit

By J.J. Regan December 13, 2018 5:00 PM

Scary news out of the WHL as Capitals prospect Alex Alexeyev had to be helped off the ice and was reportedly taken to the hospital after taking a dangerous hit during Tuesday's game.

Another angle of the hit. pic.twitter.com/EmwjhQMz4m

— Brandon Rivers (@BriversWHL) December 12, 2018

Kamloops forward Zane Franklin checked Alexeyev who fell face-first into the boards.

Luckily for Alexeyev, Red Deer and the Caps, it appears he avoided any major injury. He underwent an x-ray and a CAT scan, both of which were negative and the team considers him day-to-day. A team spokesman said he could play in the team's game Friday, but that has not yet been determined.

Alexeyev was selected in the first round of the 2018 draft by Washington and has had a phenomenal season to this point with seven goals and 24 assists in 29 games for Red Deer. His 31 points ranks second on the team and tied for fourth among defensemen in the WHL.

Other prospect notes:

· Sergei Shumakov's time with the Capitals organization is over. The Russian forward was placed on unconditional waivers Friday and his contract was terminated by the team after he refused to practice Thursday and notified the Hershey Bears he intended to leave the team. According to a team official, the entire incident took the team by surprise. Shumakov was getting top-six minutes and power play time, but that evidently was not enough. A hand injury limited him to just 10 games this season, but he scored three goals and four points. Granted, Shumakov did not leave the KHL — where he scored 17 goals and 40 points in 47 games last season — for an AHL career, but from what he showed in training camp, he was not close to being ready for the NHL. There is also a crowded offensive roster ahead of him on Washington's depth chart so a call up this season was becoming less and less likely. It was a low risk move for the Caps to sign him and this time, it didn't pan out.

Was the player's decision, and a disappointing one. Think lots of fans thought he deserved a call-up or that he was close to NHL based on past

season in KHL. Totally different game here. Never saw that from him, IMO. Good handful of guys ahead of him. Just didn't work out.

— Zack Fisch (@zackfisch) December 7, 2018

· It was expected that Shumakov would return to the KHL, but he instead signed with another AHL team, the Springfield Thunderbirds. Springfield is the AHL affiliate of the Florida Panthers who, reportedly, were among the teams interested in acquiring Shumakov's services when he first indicated he was coming to the NHL. In three games with his new team, Shumakov has one point, a goal.

· Ilya Samsonov earned his first win in nearly a month as he saved 28 shots in Saturday's 6-3 win over Hartford. It is his fourth win of the season and snapped a personal four-game losing streak.

· How's this for a weekend? Riley Barber was recalled by the Caps Friday as insurance with the team on the road and T.J. Oshie not quite ready to come back yet. He was a healthy scratch for Saturday's game in Columbus, was then reassigned to Hershey and scored a goal against Wilkes-Barre/Scranton on Sunday. The goal was Barber's ninth power play goal of the season. He has 19 points in 21 games.

· Tobias Geisser joins the list of Caps prospects who will be representing their countries at the IIHF World Juniors. Geisser will play for Switzerland. Also participating in world juniors will be Alexeyev (Russia) (hopefully) and Martin Fehervary (Slovakia). Kristian Roykas-Marthinsen will be representing Norway in the Division I tournament playing for a spot in next year's world juniors championship.

· Shane Gersich has missed the last two games for the Bears due to an upper body injury. It is believed Gersich suffered the injury after a check to the head from David Kase of the Lehigh Valley Phantoms on Friday. Gersich would finish that game, but has missed both of Hershey's games since. Kase was suspended two games for the hit. Here's a look:

Kase's minor for head contact. Certainly doesn't look pretty, but you be the judge. pic.twitter.com/LMP069ErAs

— Brad Keffer (@brad_keffer) December 8, 2018

· There were a lot of firsts this past week. Prospects Garrett Pilon and Maximilian Kammerer both scored their first AHL goals in Sunday's game. Geisser also registered his first AHL point with an assist on Pilon's goal. Here's a look at the goal by Kammerer:

That first goal feeling... Congrats @mkammerer49! #HBH #DefendTheDen pic.twitter.com/uya3dlStLz

— Hershey Bears (@TheHersheyBears) December 9, 2018

· Colby Williams registered three assists in Saturday's win over Hartford. It was the first three-assist night of Williams' AHL career.

· The AHL issued a two-game suspension to Beck Malenstyn on Tuesday for an illegal check to the head of Hartford forward Ryan Lindgren. He was out Sunday's game and will not play Saturday in Providence.

· Tyler Lewington played in his 200th AHL game Saturday and registered two assists for just the second time in his career. He also scored his second goal of the season on Sunday. Through 201 games in Hershey, he has registered a total of 447 penalty minutes.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120969 Washington Capitals

John Tortorella 'embarrassed' by Columbus' one-sided loss to the Capitals



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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By J.J. Regan December 13, 2018 1:36 PM

Before the Capitals dominated the Detroit Red Wings at Capital One Arena on Tuesday, they stopped off in Columbus on Saturday for what was expected to be a great game between the top two teams of the Metropolitan Division.

It wasn't.

Instead of two heavy-weights trading blows or the Columbus Blue Jackets going after the Capitals in an attempt to exact some measure of revenge for last season's playoff loss, Washington blew apart Columbus in a one-sided, 4-0 affair.

As you could imagine, Blue Jackets head coach John Tortorella was displeased with the result and sounded off on Monday in typical Tortorella fashion.

"I'm embarrassed as the coach of this team," Tortorella told reporters, according to The Athletic's Aaron Portzline. "I missed something along the way. I'm part of it also. I'm embarrassed that we embarrassed our organization."

The Caps took control of Saturday's game early with three goals in the first period. The physical battle that had been the trademark of last season's playoff series never came. Washington pushed and received no pushback from a Columbus team that looked like a shadow of the team that had jumped out to a 2-0 series lead over the Caps.

"It was disgusting," Tortorella said. "After our last home game, that debacle, 9-6 [loss to Calgary], to show up on a Saturday night for first-place seeding, against a team that knocked us out of the playoffs, in front of a full house, it's embarrassing."

The Blue Jackets seem to be reeling a bit of late. On Dec. 4, Columbus coughed up a 4-1 lead allowing five goals in the second period to the Calgary Flames in what turned into a 9-6 loss. A narrow overtime win over the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday was followed by the blowout loss to the Caps and on Tuesday, Columbus allowed two goals in a span of 1:18 late in the third period that turned a 2-1 victory into a 3-2 defeat at the hands of the Vancouver Canucks.

Washington and Columbus have been locked in a standings battle the last few weeks (and years) with both teams vying for supremacy over the Metropolitan Division. Now, the Caps hold a five-point lead for first place in a division that seems to be rapidly declining. At mid-December, we are still waiting to see if another team can emerge to push Washington late in the season in a battle for first place in the division. A contender has yet to emerge and, the longer the season goes, the less likely it seems that someone will.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120970 Washington Capitals

T.J. Oshie says he was held out of the lineup longer than he wanted to be as a precaution

By J.J. Regan December 13, 2018

On Nov. 14, T.J. Oshie suffered a concussion on a hit from Josh Morrissey. The concussion sidelined him for nearly a month. He finally returned to the lineup Tuesday for a game against the Detroit Red Wings, but it sounds like he was medically cleared to return sooner.

During the team's morning skate on Tuesday, Oshie revealed he had wanted to return a week sooner, but had actually been held out as a precaution.

"I've been good now for about a week and a half," he said. "This is the longest [concussion] 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."

This was the fifth documented concussion of Oshie's career. While there is still much we do not know or fully understand about concussions and their effects on the brain, it certainly appears as if the severity of a concussion and concussion symptoms can worsen with successive injuries. As a result, the team's medical personnel took no chances when it came to Oshie and held him out of play even after he was medically cleared to return.

"I felt good so what we did paid off," Oshie said following Tuesday's game. "It was an open conversation, a bunch of conversations between me and [Jason Serbus] our head medical trainer and really all our whole team of doctors. We went through it day by day. As it lingered on it was a couple of days by a couple of days and once I started feeling good they let me go. We took it slow and I got a week in of bag skates so legs-wise I felt pretty good out there. That was kind of the process for me."

Oshie admitted there had been times in the past he thought he was ready to return, but it was clear after returning he had not fully recovered which could have been a factor in the team's decision to be extra cautious.

"Every concussion's different. This one was different than all the last ones. It's really just not coming back until you're ready. I've had some where you think you're ready to play and you're pretty sure, maybe not 100 percent sure, and then a couple games in you get hit or your head hits something or whatever it is and you don't have a concussion but you have a headache now every time you get hit for sometimes a month or so."

Oshie suffered a concussion last year after a hit from San Jose Sharks forward Joe Thornton. He returned to game action 15 days later, but did not look quite right initially and registered only a single point in his first seven games after returning.

If you believe the team's decision to hold Oshie out had anything to do with that, however, Oshie disputes that notion.

"Last year I don't think I came back too quick," he said. "I wasn't able to find ways to score, really. I was missing some passes that I normally don't miss. Everyone kind of jumps on the goal-scoring drought stuff, but I felt like I was doing a lot of good things away from the puck. I was keeping the puck out of our net and I was creating chances for teammates to score. It was a learning experience, but I felt like I was 100 percent when I came back last time."

But why was it even necessary for the team to hold Oshie back? With his repeated history of concussions, not to mention his family's history with Alzheimer's, it may be surprising to some that Oshie had hoped to return earlier or that he wanted to return at all.

While the long-term effects of repeated concussions are still being studied and debated within the medical community, it is not a stretch to believe that repeated blows to the head can be detrimental to one's health.

Oshie was asked if he felt concerned after suffering repeated concussions. His answer? "Not really."

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

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2018

1120971 Washington Capitals

The conversation that convinced Todd Reirden his hockey future was behind the bench

By J.J. Regan December 13, 2018 6:00 AM

In the fall of 2004, Todd Reirden had a conversation that would change the course of his hockey career.

Reirden's first season with the Houston Aeros of the AHL was not going the way he had hoped. A three-inch tear in his oblique meant that not only could he not play, but he could not practice or skate. He could not do much in the way of physical activity for the next six weeks other than let the injury heal.

That's when Houston head coach Todd McLellan called Reirden into his office.

"There was a couple different conversations where we talked about leadership and the role that I was going to have on the team and where he was going to put me in the locker room and how he was going to utilize me as an extension of the coaching staff and that's what good leaders and captains or assistant captains of the team do," Reirden said. "At the time, I really hadn't connected the dots on where he was going with it."

This conversation, however, was different.

McLellan asked Reirden to look at video and help out the coaching staff develop the players. What had only previously been hinted at was suddenly coming into focus for Reirden. He, a player, was being asked to take on more of a coaching role with the team.

"He was still a player," McLellan said. "We're probably pushing him out of a player position and into a coaching spot."

"I guess at that point I probably should have stopped playing hockey," Reirden said. "Once a coach tells you that, it's maybe a good time to start thinking about being a coach."

Things had not come easy for Reirden over the course of his playing career. For every star NHL player like an Alex Ovechkin or a Nicklas Backstrom, there are several more player like Reirden who have to claw their way from the bottom all the way up just for a chance to reach the NHL. Once they get there, their career at the highest level is brief and over before most players may realize it.

Reirden climbed the ladder playing in the ECHL, AHL and IHL all before he finally got an opportunity to play in the NHL with the Edmonton Oilers. Reirden career saw him play for Edmonton, St. Louis, Atlanta and finally Phoenix.

The 2004-05 lockout came at the wrong time for Reirden who was at the tail-end of his NHL career, though he had not yet realized it. After playing in only seven games for the Phoenix Coyotes the year before, a 33-year-old Reirden signed with the Minnesota Wild and was sent to the AHL during the lockout.

While Reirden was hoping to make it back to the NHL, McLellan had planned for Reirden to stay and had pushed the organization to sign him.

"A lot of the American League teams, International League teams didn't want to have players like myself there because all they were doing was blocking development of young players," Reirden said. "[McLellan] felt the value of having someone like myself around to be able to just serve as a role model in terms of character in terms of how hard I worked on the ice, off the ice."

But it went beyond just being a role model or an on-ice leader.

Once Reirden joined the team, McLellan saw the way Reirden understood the game and the way he communicated with other players. He saw coaching potential in Reirden and decided that his true value was not on the blue line as a defenseman, but as an extension of the coaching staff.

"There are some great instinctive players that are hall of famers that might not be real good coaches because they might not be able to get their point across or have the necessary explanation technique," McLellan said, "Where there's some others -- and often they're grinders that have to rely on hockey IQ and the ability to share thoughts and ideas and poke and prod -- that end up being good coaches."

At first, Reirden helped with video. The team did not have a video coach so Reirden would help cut video and watch with the team and players. Reirden focused primarily on helping the younger players.

"You could tell he loved the game," said former teammate, Matt Foy, who was 21 years old during his season with Reirden. "He was a leader, but he had fun with it. He was an easy guy to talk to, very easy player to talk to. Loved yapping guys, telling them different stories and stuff. He was almost like a big brother at that time to me."

"He wasn't one of those hard veterans who would lean on you and expect you to do something that you're not capable of doing. He was really, really supportive and a friend."

After a while, Reirden's role on the team began to grow.

"Eventually [McLellan] started bouncing things off me," Reirden said. "I think he also learned and grew a little bit himself because he would ask me things. What do you think I should say to the players today? How did that come across, that meeting? That's how it started with him was simple questions like that where he was getting a pulse of the room through me and trusted that what he said stayed between he and I."

"I started then to read off of him and when I saw something that maybe he didn't ask me about, I would come to him and say I think this would have been the time where you could be a little firmer on the team. Right now, the guys are uptight a little bit, maybe if you could interject something different, a different sort of meeting today that would come at things from a different angle. He took what I said to heart and it was, I think, a really good working relationship between an older veteran player and a young, up-and-coming coach."

But eventually, injuries heal and Reirden was back on the ice. Suddenly the extension of the coaching staff had to suit up with his teammates again. Eventually, Reirden had to go back into the locker room, a sacred place among hockey teams where what is said among teammates stays among teammates and he still had to be accepted as a member of the team.

"It was something where I wanted to help [my teammates]," Reirden said, "But I also wanted to still be a player so to be able to combine that player-coach type of role, not that I was every listed as that by any means, but I think that's how some of my teammates felt about me so I wanted them to still have trust that we could still talk about things that they knew weren't going to necessarily get back to the head coach but they could still open up to me. So it was a fine line I think that I had to go through there."

"He was more of a player than he was a coach in my eyes," Foy said. "It's not like I'd watch what I'd say around Todd because he'd go rat me out to the coach. He was a friend. I don't think any of us looked on him as like oh, we've got to watch what we say. He was more of our teammate."

Reirden helped the Aeros improve by 12 wins and 18 points in the 2004-05 season. The season ended in disappointment as Houston was eliminated in the first round of the playoffs, but more importantly for Reirden, it completely changed the trajectory of his career. Though he could not bring himself to quit playing just yet, he knew his future in hockey was behind the bench.



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"Once I got over the fact of when someone's telling you that you're not maybe as good a player as you may have thought you were at that time," Reirden said, "It was actually a great transition into helping me understand the next phase of my life and how I could use this game that's been amazing to myself and my family and allowed us so many amazing experiences and opportunities to how I could possibly continue working in the game of hockey."

Reirden got his first official coaching job in 2007 when he was hired as an assistant coach at his alma mater Bowling Green State University. Just as he did as a player, Reirden climbed the ranks to the NHL. He started as an assistant in college, became an assistant in the AHL for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton and took over as head coach when Dan Bylsma was promoted to be the head coach of the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2009. In 2010, Bylsma added Reirden to his staff in the NHL and was hired by the Caps in 2014 where he helped lead the team to its first Stanley Cup in 2018 and is now the head coach.

"He understood the time that it was going to take daily, monthly, yearly to climb the ladder and he was willing to stick it out," McLellan said. "There's not many former players that are willing to do that. Give him credit."

As a coach, Reirden is known for his ability to communicate with players and help each one with a specific, individual development plan. He credits the lessons he learned in Houston for getting him this far and specifically, one conversation in particular for starting his coaching career.

"Every day is a chance for me to grow and get better and get used to responsibilities as a head coach," Reirden said. "So it's been a lot of fun and definitely a challenge, but something I love and wouldn't trade places with anybody in the world for."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120823 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes face Rangers on no rest

Emily Horos, Arizona Republic

Published 9:05 p.m. MT Dec. 13, 2018

Coyotes at Rangers

Where: Madison Square Garden.

Outlook: For the first time this season the Coyotes will play on back-to-back days. After playing at Buffalo Thursday night, the Coyotes make the trip across New York to face the Rangers Friday. While this is the first time the Coyotes will play on no rest. It won't be the last. Before the calendar year is over, Arizona will play on consecutive days twice more — Dec. 22-23 and Dec. 29-30. Meanwhile, the Rangers (14-13-3) will be coming off a few days rest after falling to the Lightning Monday. The Rangers are 5-5 when playing on more than one day of rest. The game is the first of two meetings between the Coyotes and Rangers. The Rangers will play at Gila River Arena Jan. 6.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120824 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes lose fourth in a row after falling in Buffalo

Staff Report

The Associated Press

Published 8:11 p.m. MT Dec. 13, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Jeff Skinner scored his 22nd goal of the season and the Buffalo Sabres beat the Arizona Coyotes 3-1 on Thursday night.

Casey Mittelstadt and Evan Rodrigues also had goals for the Sabres, who won their second straight following a five-game skid. Carter Hutton returned after missing Buffalo's previous two games with an upper-body injury and made 25 saves.

The Sabres improved to 11-3-2 at home, matching their win total from last season at KeyBank Center.

Christian Fischer scored for Arizona and Darcy Kuemper stopped 30 shots. The Coyotes have lost four in a row after a four-game winning streak.

The Sabres scored two early goals and clung to a 2-1 lead for more than 39 minutes before Rodrigues scored an unassisted insurance goal 6:38 into the third period. Rodrigues picked off a drop pass from Coyotes defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson in the neutral zone, skated around Alex Goligoski and sent a wrist shot past Kuemper's blocker.

Buffalo took advantage of giveaways by Goligoski to build a two-goal lead in the first seven minutes.

Mittelstadt's goal came 48 seconds into the game. Connor Sheary stole Goligoski's pass in the neutral zone and dropped the puck off to Mittelstadt for a snap shot from the edge of the left circle.

Skinner scored on a rising wrist shot to make it 2-0 at 6:54 of the first. Sam Reinhart intercepted Goligoski in front of the Sabres net and sent a stretch pass ahead to Jack Eichel. Skating up the right wing, Eichel hooked a pass around Hjalmarsson to a wide-open Skinner in the high slot.

The Coyotes responded 25 seconds later when Fischer beat Hutton with a wraparound backhand that trimmed the lead to 2-1.

Notes

Coyotes C Alex Galchenyuk missed his second straight game with a lower-body injury. Galchenyuk skated on Thursday and was listed as questionable to play. ... Sabres D Marco Scandella is nearing a return from a lower-body injury that has kept him out for eight games, coach Phil Housley said.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120825 Arizona Coyotes

Fischer scores lone Arizona goal, Buffalo Sabres beat Coyotes

Staff Report

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

DECEMBER 13, 2018 AT 8:08 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2018

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The Sabres improved to 11-3-2 at home, matching their win total from last season at KeyBank Center.

Christian Fischer scored for Arizona and Darcy Kuemper stopped 30 shots. The Coyotes have lost four in a row after a four-game winning streak.

The Sabres scored two early goals and clung to a 2-1 lead for more than 39 minutes before Rodrigues scored an unassisted insurance goal 6:38 into the third period. Rodrigues picked off a drop pass from Coyotes defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson in the neutral zone, skated around Alex Goligoski and sent a wrist shot past Kuemper's blocker.

Buffalo took advantage of giveaways by Goligoski to build a two-goal lead in the first seven minutes.

Mittelstadt's goal came 48 seconds into the game. Connor Sheary stole Goligoski's pass in the neutral zone and dropped the puck off to Mittelstadt for a snap shot from the edge of the left circle.

Skinner scored on a rising wrist shot to make it 2-0 at 6:54 of the first. Sam Reinhart intercepted Goligoski in front of the Sabres net and sent a stretch pass ahead to Jack Eichel. Skating up the right wing, Eichel hooked a pass around Hjalmarsson to a wide-open Skinner in the high slot.

The Coyotes responded 25 seconds later when Fischer beat Hutton with a wraparound backhand that trimmed the lead to 2-1.

NOTES: Fischer got a bloody nose and went to the dressing room after he was checked into the boards from behind by Eichel in the first minute of the second period. He returned for the third. ... Reinhart extended his career-best point streak to eight games. ... Coyotes C Alex Galchenyuk missed his second straight game with a lower-body injury. Galchenyuk skated on Thursday and was listed as questionable to play. ... Sabres D Marco Scandella is nearing a return from a lower-body injury that has kept him out for eight games, coach Phil Housley said.

Arizona Sports LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120826 Arizona Coyotes

Two Arizona sports venues rank well in ESPN cleanliness study

BY ARIZONA SPORTS | DECEMBER 13, 2018 AT 4:02 PM

UPDATED: DECEMBER 13, 2018 AT 4:09 PM

Good news: If you like to enjoy stadium concessions when you're taking in a game in the Valley, you're in relatively safe hands.

A study from ESPN gathered food inspection data from 16,900 inspections at 111 North American sports venues. It ranked 107 of those stadiums (the other four had insufficient data) in order from lowest to highest percentage of food outlets inside the stadium that incurred a "high-level violation" in 2016 or 2017.

Out of those 107 stadiums, two of the venues in Arizona placed in the top 10: The Cardinals' State Farm Stadium (eighth) and the Coyotes' Gila River Arena (10th). The leading venue was Oracle Arena — the home of

the Golden State Warriors — at just 1.12 percent, the best in North America by a good margin.

Only nine percent of food outlets at State Farm Stadium incurred a "high-level violation" in 2016 or 2017. Each stadium in ESPN's study included examples of violations. For State Farm Stadium, the report said: "Inspectors saw an employee change gloves without washing his/her hands on Aug. 12, 2016," and, "On June 7, 2016, inspectors noticed a slicer stored — as having been cleaned — with dried food on and around the blade."

Not far behind the Cardinals' home building was its next-door neighbor, Gila River Arena, which had a 9.52 percent violation rate. "On Aug. 3, 2016," ESPN's report read, "inspectors found an 'accumulation of brown matter' on soda nozzles. An employee cleaned them."

The other two major professional sports venues in the Valley didn't fare quite as well, but it could've been worse.

Chase Field and Talking Stick Resort Arena had high-level violation rates of 34.38 percent and 36 percent respectively, which were 57th and 58th out of 107 venues in the study. The worst-ranking venue was the Spectrum Center, the home of the Charlotte Hornets, which placed 107th with a 92 percent violation rate.

Arizona Sports LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120827 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes are missing Jason Demers on and off the ice

By Craig Morgan

Dec 13, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Coyotes assistant coach Scott Allen referenced Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" when asked how defenseman Jason Demers' injury has affected the Coyotes.

"You know the old song that says 'You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?'" Allen asked with a grim smile. "I knew what I had. We knew what we had and yeah, it makes a big difference."

Demers suffered a left-knee injury on a savvy and seemingly harmless play in the waning seconds of a 2-1 win against the Nashville Predators at Gila River Arena on Nov. 15. While jockeying for position in front of the Arizona goal with Predators forward Kyle Turris, Demers fell, rose, pushed the net off its moorings to ensure a stoppage of play with the Predators buzzing around the goal, and then fell again and immediately grabbed his knee.

He left the game with 38 seconds remaining and is out of the lineup indefinitely. Since his departure, the Coyotes have not been the same. They are 4-6-1 without him, their defense pairs have been in a constant state of flux as Allen searches for the right mix, and former partner Oliver Ekman-Larsson has struggled.

Plus-minus is not the best statistic to gauge a player's performance because there are too many variables associated with it, but it is illustrative of Ekman-Larsson's recent performance. He was a plus-2 with 12 points in the 18 games (0.66 per game) before Demers' injury. He is a minus-13 with four points in the 11 games (0.36 per game) since Demers departed.

In games with Demers, according to NHL stats, Ekman-Larsson has an SAT (shot attempted) percentage of 53.60. In games without Demers, that number is 46.81



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"It's hard not having him," said Ekman-Larsson, who also played alongside Demers for most of last season. "Jason was really good at reading me. He knew when I was going to get up in the rush so he stayed back and then those times where he was feeling good about his game I knew what to do and we didn't even have to talk about it.

"It just clicked. It took a while to build that chemistry. You don't do that overnight, but I really like playing with him."

There is a simpler explanation for Ekman-Larsson's success alongside Demers. Demers is a right-handed shot. While players and coaches sometimes downplay the importance of that mix, neither coach Rick Tocchet, Allen nor Ekman-Larsson was downplaying it on Wednesday in Buffalo.

"I've always played with righties and it's always easier to pass the puck over in the offensive zone and create something from that," Ekman-Larsson said. "I don't think about that too much, but it is just easier playing with a righty."

Some analysts and fans have wondered why the Coyotes do not play Ekman-Larsson with Niklas Hjalmarsson, who is a left-handed shot, but is more comfortable playing the right side. When the Coyotes acquired Hjalmarsson from the Chicago Blackhawks at the 2017 NHL Draft, they did so because they thought he would be a good complement to Ekman-Larsson's game.

"We tried that when they played together last year at the beginning of the year; the first two months," Allen said. "They don't complement each other. They are both outstanding with what they do and how they do it but each player's game does not complement the other's. 'O' needs somebody to get him the puck in the offensive zone. 'Hammer' plays on his off side. It limits his ability to get the puck, open up and make that pass across. 'Hammer' likes to go down the boards and we're fine with that. He does what he does well, but it does not work with O's game."

That has left Allen experimenting with a number of partners for Ekman-Larsson including Jordan Oesterle, Alex Goligoski and Ilya Lyubushkin, who is the only remaining right-handed defenseman among the seven players on the roster. Lyubushkin appeared to stabilize Ekman-Larsson for a short stretch after Demers' injury, but the two struggled during a four-goal, second-period blitz in Boston that cost the Coyotes a game.

Lyubushkin had missed the previous six games as a scratch, so he was rusty, but he is also an NHL rookie facing many hurdles in his first season out of Russia's Kontinental Hockey League. He probably isn't ready for top-pair minutes or situations. The Coyotes' decision to play him there illustrates their predicament.

"He had a couple tough shifts, but other than that I thought he played OK," Allen said of Lyubushkin's game against the Bruins. "It's not easy coming back into the lineup for anybody when you're out a while, but certainly for a guy who is still learning the league, learning the culture, learning the language – just learning. It's important that he doesn't get too down on himself because he was disappointed in himself (after the Boston game)."

While Demers' absence has destabilized the top pair, it also has had a ripple effect on the other pairs, which have been inconstant.

"Every team has that ripple effect when certain guys go down," Allen said. "If you watch that game (Tuesday) night with the couple of D that are out for Boston, we took it to them down low for a significant amount of time on certain shifts throughout the game because they miss certain guys, too. Different players being out affect you in different ways, but it has had an effect on our entire unit."

Demers' absence also has been felt off the ice. As a notoriously vocal veteran and the team's resident goofball, he has a way of calming his teammates.

"It's a little quieter around here without him, which is good and bad," defenseman Alex Goligoski said, laughing. "He's a great guy and he keeps it light. We definitely miss him in the room."

Forward Brad Richardson has a more precise reason for missing Demers.

"I definitely miss getting under his skin," Richardson said. "He's a fairly easy target for me. I get him all the time. He won't admit it. He'd never tell you I got him but I always get him."

Richardson and Demers are close friends. Demers lived with Richardson for a stretch in Arizona, and he got to know Richardson's daughter, Lexi. Richardson has a keen appreciation for what Demers brings to the room.

"Everyone has their leadership strengths," Richardson said. "The room doesn't have to be rah, rah, rah. It is what it is, but it's definitely nice to have a guy that's always making jokes and getting the guys fired up.

"He's always chirping. Everybody likes him."

President of hockey operations John Chayka hasn't ruled out a return for Demers late this season, and Demers has told his teammates he'll be back, but that return won't come soon and it is not assured. It's unlikely the Coyotes will be able to find a top-four, right-handed defenseman via trade. They are unicorns in the NHL and the acquisition cost with Demers still under contract would likely give Chayka pause.

For the foreseeable future, the Coyotes will have to make do without their top-pair stabilizer and their comedic relief.

"Trust me when I tell you I don't sit around and feel sorry for myself or we don't feel sorry for ourselves as a team," Allen said. "We know we still have a solid core of seven guys back there who can and are expected to get the job done."

"We can't do anything about it," Ekman-Larsson added. "Instead of finding ways to win we're kind of finding ways to lose. We need to find ways to win hockey games. He's a big part of our team but we need to find ways to win without him."

The Athletic LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120876 Detroit Red Wings

What the Detroit Red Wings are doing to reignite their power play

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 3:11 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018

The Detroit Red Wings haven't had much opportunity with the man advantage of late, but they need to do more when a power play does materialize.

They host Atlantic Division foe Ottawa, Friday at Little Caesars Arena, refreshed after a two-day break that followed a stretch of seven games in 11 days. Part of Thursday's practice was spent on special teams, with the power play units sporting new looks, though one of the differences came from a lack of personnel.

Analysis: Why Red Wings will move on quickly from Washington loss

Most notably, Dylan Larkin and Frans Nielsen are on the same unit, with Thomas Vanek, Gustav Nyquist and Dennis Cholowski. The other unit had Andreas Athanasiou with Tyler Bertuzzi, Martin Frk, Michael Rasmussen and Niklas Kronwall. Kronwall was subbing for Mike Green, who has a bruised foot/ankle dating to the third period of Monday's game against the Kings. Jonathan Ericsson (undisclosed) is also day-to-day.



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Larkin and Nielsen had been on separate units up until this week. They were on the same unit during the one power play the Wings had Tuesday at Washington.

"The one hard thing about our power play is that we don't get many of them," coach Jeff Blashill said. "So then it's hard to get any kind of rhythm or whatnot."

"We're hoping that moving Larks into that bumper spot, we're hoping that we can get some chemistry with both units. We're moving AA into the half-wall spot where it is more run through him as opposed to running the other side and being a one-timer, and we're hoping we can get some chemistry going."

The Wings are trying to reignite their power play, which is 2-for-31 (6.5 percent) the past 14 games, after starting 13-for-54 (24.1 percent, eighth in the NHL) through the first 18 games. They want to avoid a repeat of last season, which saw their power play drop off in December, going from 22.6 percent pre-Christmas and 13.3 percent after.

The Wings are 15-for-85 overall on power plays, a 17.6 percent success rate that ranks 20th in the NHL. Last year after 32 games, they were 21-for-102 (20.6 percent).

"We've been in a lot of games where there hasn't been a whole lot called," Blashill said. "Since the beginning of the year, where we were leading the league in penalties, we've been in lots of games where there hasn't been much called either way."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120877 Detroit Red Wings

Detroit stadiums did not fare well in food-safety inspection reports

Marlowe Alter, Detroit Free Press

Published 2:11 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018 | Updated 2:32 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018

Might want to re-think eating at your favorite sports team's home venue ... or any stadium for that matter.

ESPN's Outside the Lines released a report Thursday where it reviewed "16,000 food-safety inspection reports from health departments that monitor the 111 professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey facilities across North America."

Inspection reports from 2016-17 found that at roughly 28 percent of the venues, half or more of the food service outlets incurred a high-level violation — one that poses a potential risk for foodborne illness.

The Palace of Auburn Hills, the home of the Detroit Pistons in 1988-2017, was among the worst, ranking only behind the Charlotte Hornets' Spectrum Center.

The Palace is closed — thankfully some might say after reading this — but other Detroit venues did not fare well either.

The "best" rating was given to Oracle Arena, home of the Golden State Warriors, with 1.1 percent "high-level violations" (1 of 89) — do the Warriors lose at anything?

Types of violations include pests/bugs, poor condition of food, equipment failure or problem, employee-related issues, temperature and much more.

So where do our Detroit stadiums rank out of 107 venues with enough vendor data?

No. 106: Palace of Auburn Hills (closed)

Percent of high-level violations: 86.1 (31 of 36).

Out-of-date food: Inspectors found a gallon of milk past the expiration date in a cooler and chemicals stored next to bar syrups during a June 23, 2016, inspection. That was one of three priority violations at this location during the inspection.

Copper-cup issues: Copper-lined cups were used to serve Moscow mules at a bar on Dec. 21, 2016. Using cups lined only with copper can create a chemical reaction that allows ingestion of the copper, and such cups are banned for use in commercial food service operations by many states' food codes.

Uncovered hair: Inspectors saw employees without hair nets in the club mini-kitchen on June 28, 2017.

No. 77: Joe Louis Arena (closed)

Percent of high-level violations: 50 (14 of 28).

Raw fish storage: On Feb. 8, 2016, inspectors found raw fish (salmon) stored over cooked mashed potatoes in the walk-in cooler.

Bare hands used: Inspectors saw employees handle cut fruits with bare hands at two different bars during Jan. 31, 2017, inspections.

Uncovered hair: Inspectors saw bearded employees with no nets over their facial hair on Jan. 25, 2017.

No. 61: Comerica Park

Percent of high-level violations: 40.4 (21 of 52).

Food too warm: Inspectors found chicken salad and tomatoes at 55 degrees and potato salad and pasta salad at 45 degrees at the Press Box Lounge salad bar on April 13, 2017. Cold foods are to be kept at 41 degrees or less.

Handwashing issue: Inspectors responded to a complaint from a customer who said that on June 16, 2017, while in the restroom she saw a female employee of concession stand exit the restroom without washing her hands, and she followed that same employee back to the concession stand and observed her working with bare, unwashed hands. She stated that the employee was putting pizza toppings in a stainless steel container.

Out-of-date food: On April 12, 2016, inspectors found raw beef over cooked ground beef, which holds a potential for contamination. And on June 8, 2017, inspectors found two, 3-pound containers of sour cream with a use-by date of May 3, 2017.

No. 50: Little Caesars Arena

Percent of high-level violations: 31.7(13 of 41).

Out-of-date food: On Oct. 25, 2017, inspectors found lime juice at the bar dated for use by Oct. 11 and raisins and apricots dated for use by Oct. 2 in a cooler.

Food too cold: Inspectors measured fish, beef, chicken and green beans at temperatures ranging from 84 to 133 degrees at the Players Club West. Hot foods are to be held at 135 degrees or above.

Beer in hand sink: Inspectors saw a cup with beer in it sitting in the hand sink at the East Club on Oct. 25, 2017. Sinks designated for handwashing aren't to be used for other purposes.

No. 32 Ford Field

Percent of high-level violations: 20.4 (47 of 230).



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Raw hamburgers contamination: Inspectors saw an employee touch raw hamburger then a hamburger bun without washing hands and changing gloves on Oct. 8, 2017.

Customers didn't use utensils: Inspectors saw customers self-serve condiments without utensils at a concession stand on Oct. 16, 2016, allowing for potential contamination.

Dirty hot chocolate machine: The inside of a hot chocolate machine was dirty at a concession on Oct. 16, 2016. Inspectors ordered that the machine be cleaned on a daily basis.

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1120878 Detroit Red Wings

No more goons: Fights decline but still serve purpose for Red Wings

Gregg Krupa, The Detroit News

Published 7:49 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018 | Updated 5:34 a.m. ET Dec. 14, 2018

Detroit — It is a trend the Red Wings are happy to buck.

While fighting continues long trend of decline in the NHL, the Wings believe occasional fisticuffs unite a roster in transition and makes it tougher to play.

In a previous era, when bigger, slower players were allowed by rules and their enforcement to clutch and grab, brute force established space. Now, comparatively smaller, fleet-of-foot players dash around open ice, deploying their skills.

Increasingly, in recent years, teams seek pace, not muscle.

And, so it is that players like Tie Domi, Dave "Tiger" Williams, Chris Nilan, Bob Probert, Joe Kocur and Craig Berube, all so-called enforcers of yesteryear, find little room on NHL rosters.

"It's been an interesting kind of evolution to follow," said Stu Grimson, who played in 729 games, including 68 for the Red Wings from 1994-97, fought over 300 times and had a robust rivalry with Probert and others. "The justification for fighting probably doesn't have as much force as it once did largely because, I think, the game has changed a lot.

"You used to see guys like me employed to make it easier for guys who were skilled or smaller in stature," said Grimson, now the chief counsel for an insurance company in Tennessee and a commentator on NHL Network. "Having guys like me made it easier for guys like that to play in an era when, if you could win the battle inside the game, the physical battle, the struggle to dominate another club physically, you were well on the way to winning the ultimate battle on the scoreboard.

"I don't think that justification stands up today, as it once did."

Although fighting has declined significantly, from 0.6 fights per game in 2008-09 to a projected 0.18 for 2008-19, according to HockeyFights.com, which tracks pugilism in the NHL, Grimson said it clearly serves a purpose.

Echoing the observation of others, Grimson, dubbed "The Grim Reaper" in his playing days, said it can help inspire a team.

"I think the great justification for fighting in the game today is a tactical, strategic play, which is if my team is down by a couple of goals and we're flat and we're not playing well and I go out and get into a scrape with someone on the other side, in more cases than not — and I would

estimate it is two-thirds or 75 percent of the time — my club will tend to be more competitive," he said. "But more to the Red Wings' point: How does it bring the team together?"

"If a team is more aggressive in that respect, if they stick up for each other, it does draw a group closer together, without question. And, at the end of the day, I think that's what any manager or coach wants. He wants a team that cares for one another because they're prepared to sacrifice, they're prepared to do that small things to achieve the desired outcome, which is ultimately a win."

Despite the decline in fighting, there are some players teams rely on to fight.

"I think everybody knows I'm not going to stray away from a fight," said Luke Witkowski, the Wings' forward and defenseman.

Witkowski has fought three times this year, six times last season and four the previous one, including while playing for the Lightning.

Witkowski is 27th of the 28 Red Wings skaters so far this season in average time on ice per game, at 8:37.

Joe Kocur had 43 fights in 1985-86, the highest single-season total of any Red Wings player during the decade of the 1980s.

About non-fighting aspects of his game, Witkowski is frank.

"Fighting's part of my game, but I wish scoring goals was part of my game, too," he said. "Scoring my first was a great experience and I wish I could do that more than fight. I think every fighter would say the same thing.

"That's just our way of getting to the NHL. So, I did what I could to get here. And, that's part of it."

Players watch a lot of video, including missed scoring chances and goals, good coverage and bad.

Witkowski studies his fights, too.

"I definitely go back and watch," he said. "It's probably one of the coolest things. You feel like you're in the coliseum, in the old days. Everybody's out of their seat. Especially when you get a few punches in. Then, you really get the crowd going. You kind of feed off that.

"I remember every bad fight I've ever had. The one that really help me was the one against Tanner Glass when I was in Tampa. It was a pretty long one," Witkowski said, of a similar role player, who skated for the Rangers on March 7, 2017 when the two arranged to fight during a faceoff and traded blows for a minute and 14 seconds. "It kind of helped me prolong my NHL career, I think, a little bit."

The Red Wings entered play Thursday tied with the Rangers second in the NHL in fights with 10. The Bruins have 12.

More: Red Wings tweak struggling power play

Coach Jeff Blashill, Dylan Larkin and others say fighting is not something the Wings intend every game. But it has its place.

"Early in his career, if you remember back to my first year here, I thought that teams took runs at (Larkin) to try to test his toughness," Blashill said. "You don't see that anymore. And, you don't see that anymore because they know he's tough.

"Not that he's going to make a career out of fighting. Nor do we want him to."

In the first five games this month, the Red Wings had one fight against the Bruins, two against the Avalanche, none against the Lightning and Maple Leafs, and two against the Islanders.

They are unlikely to maintain that pace.

Besides, there are other ways of playing tough.



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"Fighting does for a team, in terms of team chemistry, what other more obscure parts of the game accomplish, as well." Grimson said. "Like blocking shots, for example."

Against the Leafs, the Red Wings blocked 30 shots.

Niklas Kronwall, who has no fighting majors in his career, blocked six shots. Mike Green, who has fought occasionally in his career, had five.

"Here's a very sacrificial act," Grimson said. "You put yourself in front of a hockey puck that travels at 90 mph and above. It's hard rubber. It can tear your face up.

"And, when you give yourself up in that way, it communicates to the rest of the group, 'I'm out there to do anything possible, anything within my means, including putting myself in front of a puck, whatever it takes, for my team to win the game.'

"That communicates to the bench: This guy is giving almost the ultimate sacrifice. It draws the group closer."

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1120879 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings tweak struggling power play

Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News

Published 3:36 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018 | Updated 3:36 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018

Detroit — It was time to move some bodies and create new looks on the power play Thursday at practice.

The Red Wings have been struggling with the man advantage — a dreadful 2 for the last 31 attempts — a stark contrast to early in the season, when the unit was ranked near the top 10 in the league (it was 20th entering Thursday's games).

Coach Jeff Blashill had tweaked personnel during Tuesday's game in Washington, and with Mike Green unavailable for Thursday's practice, the blender went to work again.

So, in the end, the Wings had Dennis Cholowski, Frans Nielsen, Dylan Larkin, Gustav Nyquist and Thomas Vanek on one unit, with Niklas Kronwall (in for Green), Martin Frk, Andreas Athanasiou, Michael Rasmussen and Tyler Bertuzzi manning the second unit.

"We're hoping to get some chemistry going," Blashill said.

Athanasiou plays the half-wall spot on his unit, and Larkin is the bumper (slot) on the first unit, both subtle changes Blashill hopes will ignite the units and create badly needed offense from the power play.

But to get a spark, the Wings have to simply get on the power play — they've only had one in each of the last two games — which is an interesting item in itself.

Generally speaking, many folks around the NHL believe officials are calling less penalties and letting more things slide.

"We've been in a lot of games where there hasn't been a whole lot called," said Blashill, agreeing to the general notion of late. "Since the beginning of the year, when we were leading the league in penalties and power plays given up, we've been in a lot of games where a lot hasn't been called either way.

"Do I sense they're relaxing? I don't know. Every game takes a life of its own, and I can't sit and say in a bunch of games they've been missing a lot of calls on either side. Generally, they do a great job. Maybe it's just the way it has been, I don't know."

There's been a growing sense around the NHL the league wouldn't mind a bit more physicality being brought into the game, and there have been a growing number of open-ice hits taking place.

Kronwall's big hit on the New York Islanders' Anders Lee last week excited the Little Caesars Arena crowd, was replayed on every highlight package, and ignited the passion in that particular game.

"Our physicality has increased over the last month, and usually one team's physicality brings out the other team's physicality," Blashill said. "You saw that in the Islanders game once Kronwall made the big hit on Lee. They really came with a big, physical presence. Those things build.

"I watch enough of the other games that I don't know they're a lot more physical, I don't have a feel for that, but I certainly know our team has been more physical."

An 'important' visit

The Red Wings made their annual visit to Children's Hospital of Michigan on Thursday, making in-room visits and providing gifts to children.

It's one event that touches everyone from players to coaching staff every year.

"This is a very important day in here," forward Frans Nielsen said. "It's one thing everybody really, really wants to do because it's so important."

The visit always impacts Nielsen because there are kids in the hospital whose ages are similar to his own.

"It's hard to see," Nielsen said. "There are 2-year-old kids in there with cancer, and stuff like that, and it's just horrible. It's just not right. You shouldn't have that at that age.

"It's terrible to see. It's wrong. Hopefully, we can do a little bit (to bring cheer)."

The day, and visit, pulls at Blashill's heartstrings.

"To have the thought that these young people and their families could potentially spend Christmas in the hospital and spend a lot of time in the hospital," Blashill said, "my niece actually goes for regular check-ups to that hospital; that part especially hits home with me.

"I'm very lucky that my three children, outside of an early heart surgery for my youngest, have been healthy. I count my blessings every day.

"It also gives you a great deal of respect for what these families go through. What usually happens is you go there and they put a smile on your face, and it's a great reminder of what is important in life. Hockey is important, your job is important, but what is really important is health and wellness and enjoying your family."

A bit of perspective, Blashill said, is always gleamed from the visit.

"For sure, the health of yourself and your family, and being around your family, that's the most important by a country mile," Blashill said. "We all lose perspective of that. We don't go to gain perspective, we go to hopefully help out and add joy to a day that can be dreary, but it certainly gives you great perspective again."

Ice chips

Green and defenseman Jonathan Ericsson didn't practice, and Blashill wasn't sure if either will be available for Friday's game against Ottawa.

... Blashill is hopeful of catching a bit of Saturday's Division II national championship football game between his alma mater Ferris State and Valdosta State (Ga.).

Ferris State won the men's basketball national title last spring.



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"The sports at Ferris have done a great job, men's basketball, and football this year and competing (for the national title), and (coach) Bobby Daniels has done as good a job as anybody in college hockey over the last 15 years, it's awesome," said Blashill, who'll be preparing for a game Saturday on Long Island against the Islanders. "I have a lot of pride, I love the university and what they've provided me. I'm a Bulldog. My wife is a Bulldog. My kids have a lot of pride in Bulldogs. If I can, I'll watch, but I also have to win a game that night."

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1120880 Detroit Red Wings

ESPN report: 86% of Palace food service outlets had 'high-level' violations in '16, '17

Staff Report

The Detroit News

Published 12:53 p.m. ET Dec. 13, 2018

Around 86 percent of food service outlets at The Palace of Auburn Hills, the former home of the Detroit Pistons, had at least one or more "high-level" health department violation in 2016 and 2017, according to a report posted Thursday by ESPN's Outside the Lines.

The percentage was the second-highest among 111 professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey facilities in North America, according to the Outside the Lines report, which indicated it reviewed 16,900 "routine" food-safety inspection reports from health departments in 2016 and 2017.

The Pistons moved to Little Caesars Arena in downtown Detroit, which they share with the Red Wings, after the 2016-17 season, though they still practice near The Palace while a Midtown practice facility is being constructed. It was reported in October that Oakland University was negotiating with Pistons owner Tom Gores' Platinum Equity to buy The Palace.

According to the Outside the Lines report, The Palace trailed only the Hornets' Spectrum Center in Charlotte, N.C., (92 percent) in highest percentage of food service outlets where inspectors found at least one or more high-level violation which, according to the report, is "one that poses a potential threat for foodborne illness."

High-level violations were discovered at 31 of 36 outlets that were inspected at The Palace, according to the ESPN report, including:

Among other facilities in Metro Detroit from 2016 and 2017, Joe Louis Arena — which has since closed — was 77th in lowest percentage (50 percent) of outlets where high-level violations were discovered, the Tigers' Comerica Park was 61st (40.38 percent), Little Caesars Arena was 50th (31.71 percent), and the Lions' Ford Field was 32nd (20.43 percent).

Oracle Arena in Oakland, Calif., home to the NBA's Golden State Warriors, had the lowest percentage, at 1.12 percent.

Detroit News LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120881 Detroit Red Wings

Which early season Red Wings trends are sustainable, and what's bound to change

By Max Bultman

Dec 13, 2018

The Red Wings are currently living in two different worlds, depending on who you ask.

Technically speaking, they're three points out of a playoff spot, an overachiever by most accounts but still a pleasant surprise after a dire preseason forecast. Or maybe they're just a mirage; a 20th-place team treading water but bound to eventually find their level.

While these Red Wings do look competitive in most of their games (although Tuesday's 6-2 loss against Washington lingers), it would be hard to deny they've also punched a bit above their weight at times this year. Dylan Larkin is nearing point-per-game levels while playing big minutes against opponents' top lines. Jimmy Howard's numbers are among the best at his position. The team as whole has been scoring much more since its disastrous 0-5-2 start.

So, in an idea borrowed from Toronto colleague James Mirtle, what's a mirage and what's here to stay? With just about 50 games left in the NHL's regular season, let's take a look.

Even strength

Goals per 60 minutes: 2.44 (22nd)

Expected goals per 60: 2.26 (T-24th)

Shooting percentage: 8.62 (12th)

Possession (CF%): 47.02 (26th)

No single one of these stats will tell you the whole story, but taken as a whole, a picture starts to come into focus. The Red Wings, obviously, aren't a great scoring team. The more traditional numbers (2.84 goals/game; 20th) would tell you that. The shooting percentage, though, suggests they may not even stay as good as they've been so far.

Detroit averaged 7.7 percent over the previous two seasons combined, and without a substantially different roster, believing the 8.62 number will hold up is putting a lot of weight into sheer progress from some young players. It's a similar story at just 5-on-5, where the expected goals for/60 is 2.13. So far, they've managed to produce 2.35.

Thus, the Red Wings' scoring is probably bound to slow down here soon.

Particularly interesting, though, is the statistical profile of Dylan Larkin. He's off to a career start, with 13 goals and 30 points in 32 games. He's just three off his goals total from last season and, as you'd expect, his shooting percentage has taken a major jump. He's up to 11.5 percent from 6.9 last year, and a two-year average of 8 percent from 2016-18.

Unless you're assuming a major leap from Larkin (which is certainly not impossible for a 22 year old), that probably means his scoring pace will slow a bit.

But it gets even more interesting. As our Tyler Dellow laid out Wednesday in his league-wide survey of every team's first line, Detroit's team-wide shooting percentage with Larkin on the ice is stunningly low. Natural Stat Trick had it at 5.67 percent on Thursday morning, and according to Dellow's data it was the worst such percentage among all first line proxy players. And it gets weirder. His current linemates, Justin Abdelkader and Gustav Nyquist, both have individual shooting percentages above 9. Anthony Mantha's was above 12. And we know Larkin's is up as an individual.

But evidence also shows Larkin is making just about everyone he plays with better at generating shots for versus against. Here's a chart from



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Micah Blake McCurdy's HockeyViz.com, illustrating 5-on-5 "with or without" score-adjusted shots per 60 minutes. The results are striking.

Source: HockeyViz.com

The best guess for Larkin is that the goals pace slows a tick, but the assists may even pick up, given that he's helping his teammates drive shots but seeing a staggeringly low payoff rate on them.

Regardless, the Red Wings as a whole are probably due for a step back offensively.

Power play

Success rate: 17.6% (20th)

Goals for per 60: 6.86 (17th)

Expected goals for per 60: 6.04 (24th)

Shooting percentage: 15.31 (10th)

Similar story here, where what looks like an artificially high shooting percentage relative to the rest of the league has the Red Wings overachieving a bit on the power-play — if you can call 20th in success rate overachieving.

Part of this high percentage may be simply because the Red Wings have a pretty small sample in shots. Their Corsi for per 60 minutes is just 87.38, good for just 26th in the league. But regardless, it's a little absurd to see the Red Wings have a higher shooting percentage on the power play than Toronto (14.49).

So some regression here could be coming, which, again, isn't what you want to hear. The power play has also only been on the ice for 131 minutes so far, second fewest in the league, so there will be plenty of opportunities for nature to run its course on this front.

One interesting nugget from Natural Stat Trick: When Dennis Cholowski is on the ice during a power play, the Red Wings' shooting percentage is around 20, compared with just over 11 for Mike Green. But the biggest difference in on-ice shooting percentage during Detroit power plays? That would be Michael Rasmussen, with whom the Red Wings go up to 25 percent shooting. The two Detroit rookies have had big impacts on this unit so far.

Penalty kill

Success rate: 78.2% (19th)

Goals against per 60 minutes: 8.17 (23rd)

Expected goals against per 60 minutes: 7.57 (22nd)

Save percentage: .850 (18th)

Nothing major jumps out here. The save percentage ranks a tad higher than the scoring numbers, but not so much that alarm bells go off — especially when you consider that the difference between the 18th- and 23rd-best PK save percentage was .015.

So the penalty kill can probably be expected to maintain its current positioning. Frankly, my eyes would have had the kill unit closer to the middle of the pack (maybe even a couple notches above where the success rate is sitting) than where the GA/60 number is positioned, so this will be a stat I'm curious to watch develop.

As for a notable individual here, care to guess the player with the best on-ice save percentage shorthanded? That would be Jacob de la Rose at .909. He's proven to be a pretty solid waiver pickup, albeit in a largely fixed role as a fourth-line center and penalty killer.

Goaltending

Save percentage: .905 (T-12)

5-on-5 save percentage: .921 (12th)

Jonathan Bernier's tough outing against Washington Tuesday really did not help him in this regard, but the split between the Red Wings' two goalies is dramatic right now.

Bernier is at an .884 save percentage in 11 starts, easily the lowest of his career in seasons with at least 10 starts. (That feels almost certain to come up — Bernier didn't become dramatically worse overnight.)

Jimmy Howard, meanwhile, is in a tie for seventh among qualified goaltenders with a save percentage of .923. That's right up there with the very best seasons of his career.

So this is where you ask yourself: Is it legit, or will it fade?

It could be a meaningful question if the Red Wings plan to ultimately trade Howard in the next two months. He's been in the league long enough that would-be suitors should base their interest and/or offers on overall body of work rather than this season alone, but a strong campaign certainly wouldn't hurt what the Red Wings could get in return. On the flip side, if he starts fading, teams may get gun shy, especially when it comes to Detroit's eventual asking price.

Howard has been legitimately good so far, but banking on him to keep being that good is asking a lot of the 34 year old.

On the whole, 12th feels a little high for the Red Wings' goaltending tandem. That said, Howard's really good start has been balanced by an equally tough one from Bernier, so it may end up staying around the middle of the pack even with some regression to the mean from both factored in.

PDO

All-situations: 100.3

5-on-5: 100.49

Despite the cool acronym, PDO is, in fact, just the sum of a team's shooting percentage and save percentage. By definition, the league-wide PDO at any given moment is 100, so being well above or below that number would be eye-raising. That won't apply much here. The Red Wings are pretty much right at 100.

The stat can be used in an attempt to measure luck, though realistically combining shooting percentage and save percentage can only account for so much of a team's actual talent level. A team with great shooters and great goaltending, for example, should have a high PDO. That's why Washington's is 103.16. As of now, however, the Red Wings would appear to have gotten about average luck.

So in the absence of a real outlier situation, we could either conclude the Red Wings have not been particularly lucky or unlucky, or just that, in this case, the stat isn't telling us much. (Remember, half of its composition is S%, a stat we have used in previous sections to hypothesize about looming regression for the Red Wings.)

For now, the safest bet is probably the latter.

Two other individuals of note

Andreas Athanasiou: Athanasiou is second on the team in points per 60 minutes of ice time at 2.29, which is about the same as Gabriel Landeskog and Taylor Hall.

His 16:33 of ice time per game doesn't look like a ton given that fact, especially with Mantha out, though ultimately he is above nearly every forward who hadn't played significant minutes on Larkin's line (the only other is Frans Nielsen, Athanasiou's center on the second line and a prominent penalty killer). And he's still up more than a minute from past seasons.

Regardless, the longer Mantha is out, Detroit may need Athanasiou more and more to score goals. If he can continue to produce at his current rate, he looks like he could be on pace for a career year. His 12.8 shooting percentage is slightly above his 11.7 figure over the previous two seasons combined, but his pace so far (11 goals, 19 points) should



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be quick enough to pass his career marks (18 goals, 33 points) even with some regression.

Gustav Nyquist: The only player on the team with a better points/60 than Athanasiou, a figure that has been bolstered by Nyquist's recent goal-scoring binge. That streak has corrected what was previously an artificially low shooting percentage back up to 9.5, a reasonably sustainable number after he was at 9.9 last year. He certainly won't score the rest of the year like he has been the last two weeks, but his 20-goal pace for the season sounds about right.

The assists, however, may be poised for a steep drop-off. The Red Wings' 5-on-5 shooting percentage is at 10.8 with him on the ice, and while Nyquist is no doubt a good playmaker, that is more than 2 whole points better than the Oilers with Connor McDavid.

So as impressive as Nyquist's 29 points in 32 games have been, counting on him breaking the 50-assist mark, as is his pace, looks too ambitious. But you probably already knew that.

Conclusions

There's nothing too genuinely surprising in here: The Red Wings' goal scoring should slow down a bit, and the same goes for a couple of their top forwards in particular. Their shooting percentages rank a little better leaguewide than the rest of their metrics, usually a sign for some decline, but on the whole, its only overachieving by a tad. They're also getting really strong goaltending, which could obviously change in a heartbeat (or a phone call).

But the big takeaway here is that those enjoying this recent run of competitive games, but still worried about landing a high draft pick, may not have to worry much at all. It looks as though nature may still run its course, without much (if any) actual change needed.

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: A brief history of players being told that they wouldn't be traded and then being traded

By Sean McIndoe Dec 13, 2018

It's been almost two weeks since the end of the William Nylander contract saga, with its twists and turns and last-minute buzzer-beater resolution. As the round-the-clock coverage fades into more reasonable daily updates, we're trying to sort through the various details that are emerging on how this deal was put together.

One of those details is Nylander's apparent belief that Kyle Dubas has promised not to trade him.

James Mirtle

✓

@mirtle

Nylander says he has assurance from Dubas he won't be traded while he's the GM.

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Because of the way the CBA works, the personal word of his GM is the only sort of trade protection Nylander can get; players aren't eligible for no-trade or no-movement clauses until they reach their UFA-eligibility seasons. So Nylander has to rely on Dubas to hold up his end of the bargain here.

And Dubas probably will – after all, trading Nylander wouldn't make much sense for the Leafs, and this is a rookie GM who'd no doubt prefer to establish a reputation as a straight-shooter. Assuming Nylander's version of the conversation is accurate and Dubas really did give his word, there's no reason to think that the young winger has anything to worry about here.

But just to be safe, he might want to stop reading right about now.

Because as it turns out, NHL history is filled with players who've believed they'd been given the same sort of assurance that Nylander says he got from the Maple Leafs. And more than a few times, those promises turned out to not be quite as ironclad as the player would have hoped.

So today, let's look back at a few of the (many) trade scenarios in hockey history that started with a firm handshake or at least a perceived wink and nudge and ended with a player angrily mumbling about loyalty while packing a suitcase.

1975: The Bruins trade Phil Esposito to the Rangers

We'll start with what may stand as the most famous example of the genre: the 1975 blockbuster that saw the Bruins trade Esposito and Carol Vadnais to the Rangers for Brad Park, Jean Ratelle and a minor-leaguer. It was a monster deal, one that saw New York acquire the player who'd led the league in goals in each of the last six seasons. And it didn't make Esposito very happy.

That was because he'd signed a new contract that summer that he assumed would let him finish his career in Boston. He'd reportedly been offered \$2.5 million on a five-year deal to join the WHA's Vancouver Blazers, but took roughly half that to stay with the Bruins. According to Esposito's version of events, Harry Sinden promised him that he wouldn't be traded, and even offered to write a no-trade clause into the deal, which at the time was rare. Esposito says he told the GM not to bother, and that his word was enough. Weeks later, he was gone.

The trade, of course, ended up being a steal for the Bruins. Esposito played well in New York, but Park became the best player in the deal. And it got even more lopsided when the Rangers decided to reunite Esposito with center Ken Hodge, and sent a young Rick Middleton to the Bruins to get him. Park and Middleton became key parts of the late-70s Bruins teams that nearly won the Cup.

At the time of the trade, Esposito told reporters that he was "crushed" and that "I thought I had a home in Boston." But he said he had "no regrets" toward Sinden or the Bruins. That tone would change over the years, as Esposito carried the grudge well past retirement. In 2013, almost 38 years after the trade went down, he was asked about the Bruins facing the Blackhawks in the Cup final and responded that "This series doesn't mean shit to me."

1991: New York Rangers trade Bernie Nicholls to Edmonton

Sometimes, a promise not to trade a player is meant as a long-term commitment. And sometimes it's only temporary, a result of short-term circumstances. That was the case for Bernie Nicholls in 1991. With his wife pregnant and the birth of twins imminent, Nicholls made sure the Rangers knew that he didn't want to be moved. He assumed that was the end of it.

And that's when Mark Messier showed up.

Messier had walked away from the Oilers on the eve of the season in an attempt to force a trade, ideally to a bigger market that would give him a



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chance to contend and eventually renegotiate his contract. The Rangers fit the bill, and GM Neil Smith jumped at the chance to bring an established star to New York.

But to do it, he had to include Nicholls as the centerpiece of the deal, leaving the newest Oiler feeling like he'd been betrayed. "Both sides knew (about his family situation), but they went ahead with the trade anyway. How could you go ahead and trade someone like this?" Nicholls asked reporters at the time. "Management showed its true colors. They showed this is just a business."

The circumstances made Nicholls a sympathetic figure, at least temporarily. But he went on to suggest that he didn't want to play in Edmonton even after the twins were born, feeling he was too old to wait out a rebuild. He ended up holding out for two months before finally reporting, and lasted a year in Edmonton before being dealt to the Devils.

As for the Rangers, the whole Messier thing worked out pretty well. It's fair to say they probably don't regret the deal.

1995: Montreal trades Kirk Muller to the Islanders

As the 1995 trade deadline approached, the Canadiens were less than two years removed from winning the Stanley Cup. But they were playing poorly and were well on their way to missing the playoffs in the league's first lockout-shortened season. And so, on April 5, they pulled the trigger on a blockbuster deal that sent Muller, Mathieu Schneider and Craig Darby to the Islanders for Pierre Turgeon and Vladimir Malakhov.

Muller initially refused to report to the Islanders, claiming that Montreal GM Serge Savard had promised him that he wouldn't be traded. And Savard didn't exactly deny that, telling reporters that "at some point, you can change your mind." The chance to land Turgeon was too good to pass up, Savard explained. For his part, Muller was furious and broke down in tears during while speaking to Montreal media after the deal.

Muller eventually reported and finished the season with the Islanders, then sulked his way through the first month of the 1995-96 season before being sent home. They'd end up trading him to the Maple Leafs in an old school three-way trade.

Turgeon had two big years in Montreal and was memorably the team's captain when the Forum closed. As for Muller, it's fair to say that Islanders fans don't look back on the situation very fondly.

1996: Boston trades Kevin Stevens to the Kings

Sinden and the Bruins make a second appearance on our list, this time for a midseason deal that ended Kevin Stevens' stint in Boston after just half a season.

After starring with the Penguins for eight years, Stevens had been dealt to his hometown Bruins during the 1995 offseason. He'd been a 50-goal scorer in Pittsburgh before a horrifying injury during the 1993 playoffs had led to a drop in play and (we'd later find out) some serious personal problems. But despite that, he believed he'd received an assurance from the Bruins that he'd be given time to rediscover his game.

That time ended up amounting to less than four months. Hobbled by a bad back, Stevens posted a disappointing 23 points in 41 games, including a memorable January night in Toronto that saw rookie head coach Steve Kasper leave him and Cam Neely on the bench for the entire game. Weeks later, the Bruins dealt Stevens to the Kings for Rick Tocchet, with Sinden explaining the deal with a cryptic reference to "concerns in training camp that never resolved themselves." Stevens lashed out at Sinden and Kasper for breaking their word. "They're a bunch of liars," he told reporters, adding that "I wouldn't have come here if I'd have known this was going to happen. It's sick."

The Bruins/Kings trade didn't really work out for either team. Stevens lasted two years in L.A. before being dealt to the Rangers as injuries and his personal problems derailed his career. Tocchet lasted just over a year in Boston before he was dealt to the Capitals at the 1997 deadline.

Maybe Stevens should have seen it all coming. After all, he'd been front and center four years earlier when the Penguins traded teammate Mark Recchi only months after convincing him to take less money on a new deal. Recchi was reportedly "destroyed" by the news, and Stevens ripped into management on behalf of his friend, saying "It's funny when people say athletes look out for themselves, that all they want is money. It just goes to show you that you've got to watch out for yourself."

2008 and beyond: The saga of Lubomir Visnovsky's no-trade clause

Most of the cases we're talking about today could have been prevented with a no-trade clause. But sometimes, even an NTC doesn't turn out to be as firm as a player thinks it is.

Visnovsky was a solid offensive defenseman who spent the first eight years of his career with the Kings. In 2007, he signed a five-year extension that included a no-trade clause that would activate on July 1, 2008. But just two days before the NTC kicked in, the Kings traded Visnovsky to the Oilers. He reportedly wasn't happy, and at the time some fans circulated a translated interview in which he allegedly suggested that the Kings had reneged on a verbal promise not to trade him.

Visnovsky was traded again midway through his second season in Edmonton, going to the Ducks for Ryan Whitney and reportedly waiving his NTC to do it. But when the Ducks agreed to trade him to the Islanders in 2012, Visnovsky tried to block the deal. He still had a no-trade clause, he argued. No you don't, the Islanders replied – the clause apparently hadn't carried over when he moved to Anaheim. That was news to Visnovsky, who tried to have the deal voided.

It turns out that the language in the CBA was unclear, and the case ended up going to arbitration. The Islanders won, and the trade was upheld. Visnovsky initially refused to join the Islanders after the lockout ended, remaining in the KHL. But he eventually reported and played the last three seasons of his NHL career in New York. He even signed a two-year extension to stick around. That deal included a full no-trade clause, although after being dealt three times with his last one, you could understand if he hadn't bothered.

Visnovsky wasn't the only defenseman to have no-trade troubles with a California team around this time. Dan Boyle waived his no-trade clause for a 2009 deal to San Jose, but only after feeling that Lightning management backtracked on a promise that he wasn't on the block. "I was misled and disrespected, and it was really not the right way to do a lot of things," Boyle said at the time. "I don't have anything good to say about how all this went down."

2011: The Flyers trade Jeff Carter and Mike Richards

This is where we get into a bit of a gray area. Did the Flyers ever come right out and tell Carter and Richards that they wouldn't be moved? That depends on who you ask. One thing that is clear, though, is that both players sure had that impression. It was a big part of the reason why both signed long-term deals that they thought would keep them in Philadelphia. And it was why both were described as being devastated when the Flyers dealt them on the same day during the 2011 offseason.

Richards had signed his 12-year deal in 2007, and said he'd have never agreed to it if he'd known the team would trade him a year before his no-trade clause kicked in. Carter took the news even harder, having just signed his 11-year extension a few months earlier. He didn't talk to anyone about the deal for days afterwards, including the Blue Jackets. He eventually reported, but never seemed happy in Columbus, and didn't last a full season there; the Blue Jackets traded him to L.A., where he reunited with Richards and helped the Kings win two Cups in three years.

If it's any consolation for Richards and Carter, they don't come close to holding the record for the quickest trade after signing a long-term contract. That honor would go to Marian Hossa, who was traded to Atlanta mere hours after re-signing with the Senators in 2005. He reportedly wasn't happy about it either, and rumors have long suggested that some of his teammates felt the same way.



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As for the Flyers, the two trades worked out well, netting them key pieces including Jakub Voracek, Sean Couturier and Wayne Simmonds. They also opened up a bunch of cap space. That part worked out somewhat less well.

Honorable mention: Hey, what about P.K. Subban?

Admit it, this is probably the one you were thinking of.

And it's certainly true that Marc Bergevin did say that he wouldn't trade Subban. His direct quote was "My intention is not to trade P.K. Subban," and we know that because he said it publicly in April and then doubled down at the draft. And then a few days later, he traded him anyway.

But while it's always fun to pile on Bergevin and the Habs over the Subban trade, this isn't really the same thing as the other cases. Misleading a player directly is dishonest and maybe even unethical. Misleading the fans and media is sometimes just part of the job. And even in his famous press conference, Bergevin chose his words carefully. He was asked if he would guarantee that Subban would stay, and he never quite did that. He just said it wasn't his intention, and intentions can change. As a wise man once said, "At some point, you can change your mind."

So did Bergevin ever tell Subban he wasn't being dealt? If he did, we don't know about it, and there have been suggestions that Subban always knew a deal was a strong possibility. So this one doesn't really fit what we're looking for here, even if it was the first deal that popped into most of our heads.

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The Athletic / Pronman's final grades: Auditing the 2013 NHL Draft

By Corey Pronman Dec 13, 2018

At the conclusion of each NHL Draft, I hand out team grades based on my assessment of the players they selected. It is an imperfect exercise though, as players change over time or my assessment can be off.

Today we look back on how teams did five years ago with the added benefit of NHL results to significantly influence the grade.

I've already re-evaluated the 2016 Draft and 2015 Draft.

An important thing to note is grades are relative, meaning I grade on a curve. So even though you perceive your draft as getting better, if other teams progressed more, that is incorporated into each team's grade.

COLORADO AVALANCHE: A-plus

Colorado with the first overall pick got the best player in the draft in Nathan MacKinnon. MacKinnon is a franchise center with elite speed, high-end skill and the elements to break open a shift. He is everything you hope for when picking first overall in the draft.

Their second-round pick Chris Bigras is a very bland player and ended up not working out. However, their fifth-rounder, Will Butcher, who was signed as a free agent by New Jersey carved out a niche as a power play specialist with the Devils. He's a solid, albeit unspectacular, NHL player. Getting another full-time NHLer to go with MacKinnon solidifies this draft haul at the top of the 2013 leaderboard.

FLORIDA PANTHERS: A

With the second-overall pick, the Panthers picked Aleksander Barkov, who became one of the best two-way centers in the NHL. He's very skilled and smart, and is a 20 minutes per game force for Florida.

Barkov alone is worthy of an A-grade, as he's an amazing player. The rest of Florida's 2013 draft was less inspiring. Ian McCoshen at 31 is just an OK player; he's mobile but lacks outstanding attributes and is more depth for the organization now than a projected NHL regular. The Panthers ended up finding an NHLer in the seventh round in Mackenzie Weegar, who is a decent third-pairing type.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS: A

I had mild doubt at one point earlier in his NHL career, but Seth Jones, Nashville's fourth overall pick (now with Columbus) emerged as the Norris candidate I envisioned when he was a prospect. He's got all the tools – size, great feet, fantastic sense – to be a star No. 1 defenseman for years to come.

In the third round, the Predators picked small goalie Juuse Saros, who I've always been a fan of. He's struggled this season but has dynamic athletic tools and I think will bounce back. In the fifth, they picked Saku Maenalanen, who they didn't sign but has since joined the Hurricanes organization and has looked solid in the AHL. Sixth-round pick Emil Pettersson is also a nice depth piece.

In this draft, the Predators identified a star defenseman, an NHL goalie and two other OK prospects, even if some of those players are no longer in Nashville.

BUFFALO SABRES: A-minus

The Sabres' 2013 class has a lot to unpack.

First is their eighth-overall pick, Rasmus Ristolainen, who people have opinions about. I'm not going to sit here and say he's an All-Star caliber defender or a perfect player, but every season he logs huge minutes, he produces big numbers, he moves the puck very well and is tough to play against. As one NHL executive put it, "on a Cup team, he's a 2-3, and not a No. 1."

After looking like he may tail off, their other first rounder Nikita Zadorov has found a niche in Colorado. He doesn't have offense in his game, but he's big, very mobile and tough to face. J.T. Compher is also a solid two-way forward for the Avs.

Justin Bailey, Nick Baptiste and Sean Malone all played NHL games but I don't think any of them are real players. The one other interesting pick is goalie Cal Petersen, now with the Kings, who has a real chance to become a legitimate NHL goalie.

So I see one very good player in Rasmus, two other NHL players and another potential one, which leads to a high grade for a Sabres draft with five picks in the top 52.

CAROLINA HURRICANES: A-minus

The Hurricanes only had four picks in this class but they made them count, drafting a top-line forward at sixth overall in Elias Lindholm and a solid middle of the lineup defenseman in Brett Pesce in the third round. Lindholm took off this season since being traded to Calgary and looks like a real impactful player. Pesce will never wow you, but he's played behind a lot of good defensemen in Carolina and is a very smart, steady defender.

ARIZONA COYOTES: B-plus

The Coyotes draft turns on Max Domi, who up until this season looked like a very solid player but nothing special. But he seems to have turned a corner with the Habs. He's got dynamic speed, skill and vision. He's very unlikely to keep scoring at his current rate and his 105 PDO will fall; but he's generating more shots and, with how good a playmaker he is, I'm convinced he's a legitimate first-line forward. After Domi, Laurent Dauphin is an OK depth piece and, although Connor Clifton played for Boston this season, I'm not convinced anything is there.

CALGARY FLAMES: B-plus



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With the sixth-overall pick, the Flames picked Sean Monahan, who has developed into a legit No. 1 center in the NHL and is a huge part of their team.

It's easy to point out the misses in this draft class. The Flames had two other first-round picks in Emile Poirier and Morgan Klimchuk who haven't amounted to anything. But the Monahan pick delivered a ton of value and made this an above-average draft haul. Their seventh-round pick John Gilmour, now with the Rangers, is a great skater and an OK depth piece.

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING: B-plus

The Jonathan Drouin pick at third overall has been the subject of much debate the past few years through some of the drama in his brief pro career, but lately Drouin seems to have found his game in Montreal. He's been dynamite this season, playing the kind of game some envisioned when he was 17. He may never be a MacKinnon/Barkov-level player, but I don't think he's that far behind right now.

Adam Erne, the Bolts' second-round pick, is a decent bottom-six type with Tampa. He's got enough speed and skill to be useful in the NHL to go with a decent power game.

Goalie Kristers Gudlevskis, the 124th overall selection, never became anything when he was in the AHL, but we will always have this memory of the Latvian.

VANCOUVER CANUCKS: B-plus

This grade is entirely based on the selection of Bo Horvat at ninth overall. Bo has evolved into a high-end, two-way center in the NHL. He's got a lot of skill but can also take the tough minutes. Case in point, his points and shots per game have never been higher than this season, while he's taking as many draws as ever in the defensive zone and killing penalties.

The story for fellow first-round Hunter Shinkaruk is less sunny. He was very skilled, but lacked the pace and compete in his game to become an NHL player.

WINNIPEG JETS: B-plus

The Jets had 10 picks, and three inside the top 60, so there's a lot to unpack here.

First-round pick Josh Morrissey really emerged of late. He's a very smart and mobile defenseman who is logging all-situations minutes. Is he ever going to be a true star offensive producer? Maybe, maybe not, but he's a big part of their team right now.

Second-rounder Nic Petan struggled in the NHL, but looks good at other levels. He's a great playmaker but doesn't have the pace you'd want in a smaller forward. Fourth-round pick J.C. Lipon played NHL games but he's not a real prospect.

Andrew Copp, on the other hand, became an OK bottom-six forward, and Tucker Poolman is a passable NHL defenseman. Goalie Eric Comrie is a fine prospect still, but the main reason for the Jets grade is Morrissey.

DETROIT RED WINGS: B

The Wings' draft hinges mostly on what you think of Anthony Mantha. If you just love the skill set he has – a tall forward with skill, skates reasonably well and can score – you get excited and think he's a big-time player and the Wings' grade should be higher. If his consistency issues worry you, the grade may be a half letter lower.

The B is not just due to Mantha, though. The Wings drafted three full-time NHL players. Tyler Bertuzzi continues to trend up and carved out an everyday role for himself getting real minutes. He's not a guy who will blow you away but he can make plays. Mattias Janmark, with Dallas, looked at one point like a real player but he's stagnated of late. He's got skill but he's more of a bottom-six type.

NEW YORK RANGERS: B

The Rangers' 2013 draft was fascinating. They had five picks and didn't pick until 65 but got two NHL regulars in Pavel Buchnevich and Anthony Duclair – both somewhat divisive players but quality NHLers, particularly Buchnevich.

Buchnevich is a highly skilled winger who can make unique offensive plays. He may never wow you with his pace or compete, but he can create offense and help an NHL power play. I remember him playing his draft season on the same team with top 10 pick Valeri Nichushkin and U18 coaches mentioning those two in the same breath (now you'd argue Buchnevich is a better player).

Duclair has been very up and down over his career. People fall in and out of love with him due to his electric speed and skill but frustrating consistency. He started off this season well with Columbus but his ice time has steadily decreased. I still see him as a top-nine guy.

ANAHEIM DUCKS: B-minus

The main return from the Ducks' draft was their first-round pick Shea Theodore, now with Vegas. He's a solid top-four defenseman who is highly mobile and intelligent but short of being a true top-end defenseman. I had hope for second-round pick Nick Sorensen at one point, but he got injured a lot and never seemed to turn a corner in his development. There was a point where I thought seventh-rounder Miro Aaltonen may turn into something, but despite being talented he didn't seem that fast for a small guy.

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS: B-minus

Chicago's 2013 class might not be the most exciting draft haul, but if you look at it, they've generated a lot of NHL games.

Ryan Hartman is a fine middle-six forward, now with Nashville. He's got some skill and grit but will never be confused for an impact guy.

John Hayden (still with Chicago) and Tyler Motte (with Vancouver) are not playing special, but they are full-time NHL players who are OK bottom-six types. Carl Dahlstrom and Luke Johnson have played games but both are depth guys for me.

Three full-time NHL players is a decent draft even if only one is a real noteworthy player.

EDMONTON OILERS: B-minus

The Oilers had a top 10 pick and selected Darnell Nurse, who has been very good in the NHL. He may never be a big point producer, but defensemen with his size and mobility are tough to find. He's great defensively and can move the puck fine too.

There's not much after him to get excited about, though. Longtime readers will remember I was a big fan of Anton Slepyshev, who is pretty skilled but lacked the pace/physicality for the NHL. He gave it his best shot for a few years with the Oilers before going back to the KHL.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS: B-minus

The Islanders' draft gets value from Ryan Pulock developing into a very solid top-four defenseman. That was an outcome I was skeptical about at one point due to so-so mobility and defensive play, but he's very smart, moves the puck well and has an elite shot. He plays all situations and has proven to be a quality pick at 15th overall. After him there isn't much from this draft. USHL MVP Taylor Cammarata, picked in the third round, flamed out hard. Alan Quine, a re-draft after being a Detroit pick, played some games and is a depth guy now for the Flames.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS: B-minus

The Penguins didn't have a pick until No. 44 but still managed to pull off a decent draft, in large part due to selecting Jake Guentzel at 77th overall. Guentzel became a very good top-six forward in the NHL and his game continues to improve as he heads toward his mid 20s. He's a very smart scorer who may never blow you away with star-level skill/speed but his production continues to trend towards the top tiers. The Penguins'



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first selection, goalie Tristan Jarry, is just OK. He's more of a depth guy for the organization right now.

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS: C-plus

Columbus' draft at one point showed so much potential. They had three first-round picks, and their first five picks have all played games, but it's hard at this point to be overly optimistic about this class.

Alexander Wennberg has been up and down in the NHL and has injury issues. He's a solid player and a very good playmaker, but he's more just a fine middle-six forward than a true impact guy. Kerby Rychel is an AHLer, and Marko Dano is nothing more than a depth guy right now.

Oliver Bjorkstrand has had a tough season. He's full of talent and can score, but for his size, the pace he can play at is a question mark. I think he can get it going again, but he's certainly stagnated a bit this season. Dillon Heatherington, now with Dallas, is an OK depth guy without a ton of offensive upside, but he's a big and mobile defenseman.

They've gotten NHL games out of this class, but one player whose a quality guy right now in Wennberg and another player or two who are treading water in Dano and Bjorkstrand.

MONTREAL CANADIENS: C-plus

Montreal's 2013 draft is as mixed a bag as you can get. Their first-round pick Michael McCarron hasn't worked out. He's big and has some skill but doesn't make many plays or have much pace in his game. Jacob de la Rose at 34th overall is a fourth-liner in Detroit, and Zachary Fucale at 36th overall is currently a below-average ECHL goalie.

Now for the good. Montreal drafted two everyday top-nine forwards in Artturi Lehkonen and Sven Andrighetto (now with Colorado). Lehkonen, the sole NHL piece with the Habs, developed into a solid NHL player who can play on both special teams. I had time for Martin Reway at one point, but a scary heart ailment forced him to an early retirement.

The Habs also drafted forward Connor Crisp at No. 71, but he never ended up being anything as a pro. At least we will always have this memory.

WASHINGTON CAPITALS: C-plus

The Caps' 2013 draft is an interesting one. It's generated three NHL players, but none of them are producing at high levels.

Their first-round pick Andre Burakovsky is a very talented player with a lot of speed and skill. He's fallen a bit out of favor in Washington lately, though, and has struggled to get real ice time this season. Similarly for second-round pick Madison Bowey, he's a talented player with the size and mobility to be a player but I've never loved his instincts and he's a third-pairing defenseman in Washington now. Zach Sanford, now with the Blues, is a decent bottom-six winger with a good athletic toolkit. That's a fine haul for the Caps, landing NHL players with their first three picks, but you'd like to see a bit more impact after all these years.

DALLAS STARS: C

I was very excited about Dallas' draft primarily due to Valeri Nichushkin. Here was this big, strong winger with elite speed and good skills who showed the potential to be a dominant power winger. The story since is less exciting, as he was so-so, bolted to the KHL for a few years, came back and is now a fourth-liner who lacks the sense to make plays with his natural gifts.

Dallas' other first rounder, Jason Dickinson, who I was never a huge fan of, arguably passed Nichushkin. His skill set is nothing special, but he's fine at everything, generates some offense and can PK.

Remi Elie is a speed and grind player who is a depth guy in Buffalo at the moment. Nick Paul, a significant piece of the Jason Spezza trade, is a depth guy now in Ottawa, but he has enough tools that I could see a plausible argument that he carves out a career.

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS: C

The Flyers at No. 11 picked Samuel Morin, a divisive pick that has been discussed a lot in the public and scouting communities in the past five years. Morin looked like he was tracking to compete for a spot on the Flyers this season, but his upside isn't all that significant and, if he does make it when he gets healthy, it's hard to see him more than a bottom half of the lineup type.

The Flyers' second pick, Robert Hagg, became a solid everyday NHL defenseman. He will never wow you, but he's steady and well-rounded. Tyrell Goulbourne played NHL games, but being realistic, he's not an NHLer.

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS: C

Toronto's 2013 draft is known for first-round pick Frederik Gauthier and seventh-round pick Andreas Johnsson. Freddy the Goat is a fine defensive center but in the NHL he hangs around replacement level value.

Johnsson, on the other hand, is a real player. He's got legit NHL offensive tools and is a regular on one of the best power plays in the league this season. He looks like he's going to be a quality middle-six forward in the league.

LOS ANGELES KINGS: C-minus

The Kings' 2013 draft has one player in the NHL in Valentin Zykov (with Edmonton), and he's barely hanging on to that job. What keeps their grade from being lower is this class still has some hope for a few guys.

Zykov is a player I know some scouts like due to his size, skill and shot, even if I question if he'll ever be able to skate at an NHL level. Jonny Brodzinski has done OK in the NHL and well in the AHL but is out now with an injury. He can score but pace might limit him. Seventh-rounder Dominik Kubalik excites scouts as a prospect, but the Kings need to get him to cross the pond. Hudson Fasching played NHL games but he's an AHLer.

NEW JERSEY DEVILS: C-minus

The Devils made only five picks and none until 42nd overall but got a few players from this class. Miles Wood at No. 100 proved to be a solid pick. He's got speed and size but his playmaking will never wow anyone. Steve Santini has played games but his offensive upside has always been a question despite his size, mobility and physicality, and he isn't playing games in the NHL now. Wood hasn't had his best season. I think there's a little more there but getting true above-average regulars from this class seems unlikely.

OTTAWA SENATORS: C-minus

At 17th overall, the Sens picked Curtis Lazar, whose career since then has taken many ups and downs, and he is now in the AHL. He's producing for Calgary's affiliate, but despite his speed and work ethic, his offensive upside is questionable and it's hard to see him as more than a depth piece for the Flames.

Ben Harpur is a just OK NHL defenseman who is playing minutes now for the Sens. Third-round pick goalie Marcus Hogberg is a plausible prospect, but he's getting on the old side and needs to remain healthy and consistent in the AHL.

This class produced NHL games, so credit to the Sens, but there isn't much NHL impact currently from the players selected.

SAN JOSE SHARKS: C-minus

This wasn't a memorable draft for the Sharks, with their Day 2 picks never even really smelling the NHL. Their saving grace from the lowest grades is 18-overall pick Mirco Mueller found his game a bit after being traded to New Jersey. Mueller is nothing special, but he's mobile and smart, and is a competent defender with very little offense. He's playing regular minutes with the Devils, but I can't imagine him becoming more than what he is now.

BOSTON BRUINS: D



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This draft didn't go well for the B's. Their highest pick, Linus Arnesson at No. 60, is big and mobile but lacked the offensive upside to move the puck well at the AHL level, nevermind the NHL. Peter Cehlarik played some games and has good offensive instincts, but lacks NHL footspeed and is a depth guy. I'm still holding out some hope for Ryan Fitzgerald to turn into a lower-end guy even though it's been five years since the draft and he hasn't played an NHL game. He's been productive this season. Anton Blidh played some games but I'm not a fan.

Despite not having one full-time NHLer from this class, the B's don't get an F due to having some minor hope that a guy like Fitzgerald could turn out.

MINNESOTA WILD: D

The Wild get a low grade due to no current NHL players.

Three players from their draft class have played games. Gustav Olofsson, Kurtis Gabriel and Carson Soucy. Olofsson, now with Montreal, is a depth piece for the Habs. He moves the puck fine but is nothing special. He could be a call-up at some point when he gets healthy but is expected to miss most of the season. Soucy is a depth defender for the Wild now.

ST. LOUIS BLUES: D

This is an example where my strict grading system may not seem fair given I look at results and not value per pick. The Blues had four picks and none until No. 47, but looking at the returns, it's nothing to write home about.

With their two second-round selections, the Blues picked Tommy Vannelli and William Carrier. Vannelli didn't work out. He was considered a pretty toolsy defenseman but scouts questioned his hockey sense. Carrier, now with Vegas, has turned into an OK fourth-line forward. While he's playing in the NHL, he's not providing much value and his job is on the bubble.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.14.2018

1120985 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs not frustrated after dropping tilted game to Lightning

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris December 13, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. — If you're the Toronto Maple Leafs, you can look at this a couple different ways.

You can look at the scoreboard and what is now an eight-point deficit to the Tampa Bay Lightning in the standings and feel frustrated. Or you can look at the fact you generated 49 shots against the NHL's best team and dominated a game in their building territorially.

It's not too often where you lose 4-1 and actually feel encouraged by what happened. But that's where the Leafs found themselves on Thursday night.

"I think you come in here and you never know if you're in a spot to play with the good teams until you play them. I thought we had a good account of ourselves," said coach Mike Babcock. "Obviously, the score is disappointing, but the way we played is not one bit disappointing."

Under the circumstances, it was one of their finer efforts of the season.

The Lightning are Stanley Cup favourites and have reeled off 11 wins in the last 12 games. They have depth and skill at every position. During Thursday's game, Jon Cooper had control of the matchups with last line change and yet the heatmap still wound up looking like this:

Toronto burned a blue hole in the area around the top of Andrei Vasilevskiy's crease — the area of the ice where goals come from. Were it not for several incredible saves by the six-foot-three goaltender with a gymnast's ability to dance around the blue paint, this would have gone differently.

"When you're that big, you take up that much room and you move that well, it's tough to score," said Leafs sniper Auston Matthews. "You've got to get guys in front of the net, but even when we did, he was able to stick a pad out or make a sprawling save and keep the puck out of their net."

Babcock had labelled this a night for gauging where his 21-10-1 team is truly at. "We're going to find out a lot here," he said beforehand. Then he saw each of his top three lines post positive shot differentials against the only team in the Eastern Conference that can match their forward depth.

The Andreas Johnsson-Matthews-Kasperii Kapanen line was on the puck all night and produced Toronto's only goal — a nice snipe from Kapanen after intercepting a Nikita Kucherov pass before the six-minute mark.

You could argue that Kapanen, now with 12 goals in a breakout campaign, has made a strong enough case to remain beside Matthews even when William Nylander gets back up to full speed after his long contract impasse.

"I don't have to think about that right now because I've just got to watch," said Babcock. "We'll just see what happens. The beauty of it as you get more depth you can move people around. In the past we didn't have as many movable parts. I think we'll have more movable parts as we go forward."

Against the Lightning, the Leafs second line produced 16 shots on its own — seven from Mitch Marner, six from John Tavares and three from Connor Brown. Nazem Kadri, the third-line centre, also had six shots on net and another that struck the post.

Even accounting for the two defensive breakdowns that led to goals by Tampa's Alex Killorn and Tyler Johnson in the final minute of the second period, Toronto produced a monster performance against the Atlantic Division giant.

"I like playing good," said Babcock. "The league adds up wins or losses, but the bottom line is you stay with the process and you do good things, good things happen over time. Some nights it doesn't go your way, you get on with it."

In this sport, the scoreboard occasionally lies.

Just as Toronto has won some games it probably didn't deserve when goaltender Frederik Andersen stood on his head, it's bound to lose the odd one like this.

It came with a little extra buzz inside Amalie Arena and stars all over the ice. The game lived up to its advance billing despite the 4-1 score, especially when you consider the number of Grade A chances for the Leafs, which included a power play in the second period where their top unit was in the offensive zone for the entire two minutes and produced eight shots.

"I feel like we possessed the puck a lot of the game," said Matthews.

"We put a lot of pucks on net, we drew a lot of penalties," added Tavares. "I thought we were really good on our forecheck and pressuring their D and causing turnovers and not giving them a whole lot."

It helps explain why there was very little evidence of outward frustration as players made their way to the bus afterwards.

They came to Tampa to see if they could handle a 25-7-1 buzzsaw and laid a building block of belief over 60 quality minutes. There are still three more meetings with the Lightning in the final 50 games and the possibility that a playoff series looms beyond that.

"I don't think you want to hang your head. I think you're obviously disappointed in the result," said Tavares. "We have high expectations for



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ourselves and tonight was an important two points, but it's a long season and we'll see these guys again."

If they repeat this performance, it's unlikely the result remains the same.

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1120986 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Canucks battle back to earn impressive point

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet December 14, 2018

Winning an improbable point seemed as meaningful as losing a difficult road game Thursday as the Vancouver Canucks scored twice in the last four minutes of regulation to force overtime in a 4-3 loss to the Nashville Predators.

The Canucks, who also scored twice in the final four minutes of Tuesday's 3-2 win in Columbus, extended their points streak to four games (3-0-1) against one of the National Hockey League's best teams.

The streak began with the Canucks' 5-3 win against the Predators in Vancouver last Thursday. The Canucks look like an entirely different team than the one that went 1-10-2 until a win a week ago launched it into a successful three-game trip.

Colton Sissons redirected Nick Bonino's goalmouth pass behind Vancouver goalie Anders Nilsson at 3:05 of overtime. Bo Horvat, beaten up ice by Sissons on the winner, had tied it short-handed on a rebound with 44 seconds left in the third period. Nilsson was on the bench, so the Canucks were skating five-against-five with an open net behind them when they tied it.

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The comeback began with 4:05 to go when Brock Boeser wired a one-timer past Nashville goalie Pekka Rinne to end a 1-for-22 slumber by Vancouver's power play.

Jay Beagle's short-handed goal was the only Canucks score through 55 minutes as the Predators led 3-1 on goals by Ryan Hartman, Calle Jankrok and Bonino, then dominated much of the final period but were stymied by Nilsson.

Still five points out of a playoff spot after their November nosedive, the Canucks open a five-game homestand Saturday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

ALWAYS A GOALIE CONTROVERSY

Canucks coach Travis Green chose to start Nilsson because the backup hadn't played in nine days and Vancouver is going to need both of its goalies if it wants to cling to the playoff race long-term. But to get Nilsson playing time, Green sat down hot starter Jacob Markstrom, who had won the previous three games and is playing as well as he has this season.

We have no problem with the coach going to Nilsson, who was good in his last two starts even if he hasn't won in six appearances since Oct. 16. We have a problem with Nilsson whiffing on the first real Nashville shot he faced (Hartman's wrister from above the circle at 5:52) and losing his angle enough for Bonino to shoot far side and make it 2-0 at 8:40.

But by the third period it was impossible to blame Nilsson on the night because the netminder made a handful of five-alarm saves to keep the

Canucks close. Shots in the final period were 14-6 Nashville before Vancouver started to push shortly before Boeser's goal.

Nilsson probably played better than most of his teammates. The resilience of both was impressive.

UNOFFICIAL CAPTAIN MY CAPTAIN

Horvat, who doesn't need the C to be the Canucks' leader, made his second-most important play of the game after a whistle.

When Roman Josi dangerously cross-checked Horvat in the numbers late in the game with the score still 3-1, Jake Virtanen skated in to engage the Predators captain. But knowing his team was going to the power play, Horvat backed off Virtanen to ensure Josi was the only one going to the penalty box.

Thirty-nine seconds later, Boeser crushed one past Rinne and it was game on.

In the NHL since he was 19, Horvat seems to have been born old. Now 23, he possesses an awful lot of wisdom.

Horvat's actions on the Josi play proved how smart he is, and how tough. Tough enough to get something from a game the Canucks should have lost in regulation.

BOESER BETTER

As if his hat trick Sunday in St. Louis wasn't enough evidence that Boeser's scoring touch is back, the sophomore who missed 13 games with a groin injury put an exclamation mark on it with his power-play one-timer from his off-wing. It was vintage Boeser – if you can be vintage anything at age 21 – as he scored his first power-play goal since last February. Even with his slow start after last season's serious back injury, then his groin problem, Boeser has 10 goals in 21 games.

His 23:06 of ice time Thursday, however, was about a minute too long. Boeser got caught on the ice for 1:45 during overtime. Long change, three-on-three, that can happen.

But Boeser, easily rounded by Josi on one scoring chance, needs to be a little more aware when defending in OT. He was puck-watching and got burned in overtime in the Canucks' 2-1 loss to the Los Angeles Kings two weeks ago.

LINEUP CHANGES

Erik Gudranson was a game-time scratch due to back spasms. He was replaced by Alex Biega. If Green thinks he needs another lineup change on Saturday, he may wish to consider forward Tim Schaller, who logged only 4:12 on Thursday but was on the ice for Nashville goals on two of his eight shifts.

PETRUS-FIED

Yes, Canucks prospect Petrus Palmu returning mid-season to Finland's top league to get playing time is the best thing for him. But the Canucks shouldn't be rejoicing at doing "the right thing" for the 21-year-old because the best thing for the organization would have been for the fire hydrant of a winger to spend this season learning the North American game with the Utica Comets.

Instead, Palmu returns to TPS Turku after getting into only 12 of 28 American Hockey League games, leaving after no goals and one assist in what should have been a development season with the Canucks farm team.

We get it: the Canucks have a lot of young prospects, especially promising wingers, who need playing time in the AHL. But Palmu, a sixth-round draft pick from 2017 who was the Finnish League's rookie of the year last season when he scored 17 times in 59 games, was better than most peers at the Canucks' prospects tournament in September and looked comfortable against NHL players during the pre-season. Even at five-foot-six, he looked plenty strong and aggressive enough to handle the North American game.



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Had things gone great for him in Utica this fall, Palmu would still be a longshot to become an NHL regular. And he'll get excellent development time with Turku – albeit beyond the Canucks' immediate control – and has years left to try to make the NHL. But it's hard not to see his return to Finland, after a promising September in the Canucks organization, as a setback for Palmu and the club. Hopefully, that's all it is.

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Sportsnet.ca / Montreal Canadiens' Andrew Shaw continues strong play as confidence returns

Eric Engels December 14, 2018

MONTREAL— Andrew Shaw catches a breakout pass and one-touches it to linemate Jonathan Drouin before driving up the middle of the ice on his way to making the play that ultimately gives his Montreal Canadiens a 6-4 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday night at the Bell Centre.

Drouin immediately throws the puck across the ice to Shea Weber on the zone entry while Shaw holds the line and then darts into open space. The puck finds the plucky 27-year-old's stick and he shifts it from backhand to forehand and buries it in one swift motion for Montreal's fifth goal of the night.

It's one of nine goals Shaw has scored in the 28 games he's dressed for this season. It extends his point streak to six games and gets him to within one tally of his total over 51 games last season. And it helps put everything in perspective.

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A little over eight months ago, Shaw's hockey career was in jeopardy. It was at the end of last season — the Canadiens were cleaning out their lockers after a 28th-place finish in the standings — that he was standing in front of his stall contemplating whether or not he could continue to play the same grinding style that had helped him contribute to two Stanley Cup wins with the Chicago Blackhawks and earned him the six-year, \$23.4 million he signed with the Canadiens after being traded to Montreal in the summer of 2016. And for the first time in his life, he really wasn't sure.

A knee injury that required surgery and a six-month rehabilitation was part of that. But the concussion suffered on the same collision, which cut his season short by a month, was what had created the self-doubt he was exhibiting.

Some soul-searching was in order.

"I talked to family, friends, teammates, coaches, guys in the front office, and my agent, too," Shaw said after Thursday's game. "I talked to everyone that I could to get as much input as I could."

Nausea, motion sickness, balance issues, depression had forced the issue, and the people closest to Shaw expressed their concerns with him continuing his career. This was one of many concussions he had suffered over the years and the residual damage from all the knocks had caught up to him and left him and family members worried.

"I don't know how many doctors I saw this summer," said Shaw. "A handful of them, obviously. A lot of positive came out of it. I had some rehab that I needed to do to fix some things that were affecting me. A lot of vestibular stuff, some vision stuff, balance stuff."

With agent Pat Brisson's help, he sought medical attention from four doctors in Montreal and frequently saw a specialist in his hometown of Belleville, Ont., that helped him recalibrate his vestibular system.

"There were times when I'd get in cars and I couldn't even sit in the back," Shaw said. "I always had to drive. Motion sickness was probably one of the worst things. Spinning around was bad. On the ice, finding pucks was really tough for me. My eyes weren't responding. The signal from my brain to my eyes was a lot slower than it should be for an average person. It was something we found and I did a lot of eye movement, a lot of spinning in chairs, walking on a wooden plank, spinning a striped umbrella [to fix it]."

"Then I went and saw all those doctors again and did more tests to see if anything improved and it was getting better and better. I had one last visit and they said everything was clear, it was good and back to above average in all categories."

And slowly, but surely, Shaw's confidence began to return to him.

It wasn't necessarily there at the start of the season. Rehab on his knee was supposed to keep him sidelined through the first month, but he trained aggressively and returned for Game 1 after missing all of training camp.

Shaw was a step behind and found himself scratched from a series of games after struggling through Montreal's first four of the season. And people around the city began airing their doubts—on social media and on sports-talk radio and television—about whether or not he still had his place in the NHL.

But Shaw caught his wind and found his stride in a hurry, and he has since built his case as one of the team's most important players as they've established a 16-11-5 record through 32 games.

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So you can understand why he's taken a lot of pride in silencing his critics. More than anything, you can see why he's taken time to also savour precious moments like the one he was at the centre of on Thursday.

"It's very rewarding," Shaw said. "If you know me, you know that I don't see a life without hockey. I don't see myself not playing. I think that's what drove me to everything in my power to make sure I can get back to where I needed to be. I don't see my life without hockey in it, without playing in it at least. At some point, there's going to be a time when I have to call it, but I'm 27. I'm young. I'm not old."

"It was a long summer for me with both the knee and the head and pushing through it. It was mentally as exhausting as it was physically. I think just being able to sit back from the game, look back at what I had success with, getting back to the game and back to my roots is giving me the success that I'm having."

To see the joy Shaw's squeezing out of it — playing some of the best hockey of his career next to Drouin and Max Domi on Montreal's top line — has been something his teammates have appreciated, too.

"Injuries slow down all players, but Shawzy is a warrior," said Canadiens centre Phillip Danault, who had two assists in Thursday's game. "He's won Cups and been through the wars and it's taken its toll, but the Shawzy we see now is the Shawzy I knew when we played together in Chicago. He practises so hard and his enthusiasm in the dressing room is excellent. I'm happy for him. He's a big piece of this team."

Thursday's key contribution was just one more piece of evidence to support the fact.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2018

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs no longer far away in Lightning's rearview mirror

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris December 12, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. — When John Tavares tested the open waters last summer, he admits he was drawn to the Lightning. The strength of Tampa's ownership, the track record of its front office and several years of Stanley Cup contention made it an awfully appealing option.

"What's been really impressive over the years is they've kind of had to fill roles and fill spots with a team that's been up against the cap," Tavares said Wednesday. "They've managed that very well, obviously using the [favourable] state tax to their advantage. You continue to see them add young players that make an impact for them. You need to have that, especially in this era I think.

"I think that's what's very strong here [in Toronto], as well. It's something I saw that I think both teams had."

A third of a season after Tavares chose to come home and sign with the Maple Leafs, the organizations appear to be closer than ever before.

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Tampa is occupying pole position, of course, having followed up three near-misses in the last four years by pacing the entire NHL in wins, points and total goals scored so far this season. But the Lightning are mindful of the big blue object in the rearview mirror since Toronto is second in each of those categories heading into their meeting at Amalie Arena on Thursday night.

"The more we can distance ourselves from the team behind, the better," said Lightning defenceman Victor Hedman. "Tomorrow's going to be a tough game, we know that, probably the toughest one of the year. We need our A game."

The Leafs and Lightning appear to be on a crash course for one another and both sides can sense it. Especially with the NHL's wonky divisional playoff format, which could see them each finish higher than the 29 other teams and still meet in the second round — just as Nashville and Winnipeg did last season, and Washington and Pittsburgh did two springs ago.

It may be inequitable, but it almost feels inevitable.

The playoff format is a sore subject around the Toronto dressing room these days, in part because the Leafs finished as the NHL's sixth-best team last season and still opened on the road at No. 4 Boston, but also because they may yet draw another brutal first-round matchup this spring even if they finish higher in the overall standings.

"Our division is pretty deadly at this point," said Leafs centre Nazem Kadri. "Obviously that's kind of at a disadvantage for us, it'd be nicer to play a seven or eight seed."

"My personal preference is the old format," said Tavares. "I remember being in a scenario a couple years ago on the Island and we ended up playing Florida because we didn't finish higher in our division and the Rangers ended up playing Pittsburgh and it was a quick series. I think ideally you earn that seed and that position."

Under the current system, the path of least resistance for a Leafs team expecting to take a step this year would be finishing atop the Atlantic Division and drawing a wild-card entry in Round 1. That would mean leapfrogging Tampa, which currently holds a 49-43 edge in points with an extra game played.

In all likelihood, it will probably require them to make up some ground in the four head-to-head meetings, which adds an extra layer of intrigue to the first of those games here on Thursday.

"I think so because potentially we could see 'em down the road, which definitely makes things a little more interesting from a player and a fan perspective," said Kadri. "It gives you guys something to talk about."

The Lightning have been a runaway train of late, steamrolling the league with seven straight wins and 10 in their last 11 games despite missing No. 1 goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy to injury for the last four weeks. They haven't skipped a beat because an offence fuelled by Brayden Point (21 goals), Steven Stamkos (15) and Nikita Kucherov (12) is averaging four goals per game — a pace no team has managed to maintain over an entire season since the 1995-95 Pittsburgh Penguins.

By comparison, the fire-wagon Leafs are averaging 3.65 goals per game on the backs of Tavares (19), Auston Matthews (16) and Kasperii Kapanen (11).

You might want to consider taking the over when they're all on the same ice together.

"I mean they can obviously score at will, too. I think kind of like us," said Matthews. "[They have] a lot of depth, a lot of speed, you want to stay disciplined against them. They've got a good power play and they've been obviously very hot lately.

"They're probably the top team in the league right now."

They are the bar by which the Leafs are measuring themselves.

The Lightning have been among the NHL's elite for half a decade — reaching the Stanley Cup final in 2015 and Game 7 of the Eastern Conference final in 2016 and 2018 — but Toronto isn't content to simply wait its turn in the queue behind them.

"They're setting the standard for the National Hockey League and we'd like to be where they're at," said Leafs coach Mike Babcock. "We want our young guys to get the experience quicker so that we can be a good playoff team quicker, but in the meantime we've got to win regular season games."

It would be a bonus if that included the ones where they faced the Lightning.

By the numbers

Tampa

Point%: .766 (1st)

GF/G: 4.00 (1st)

GA/G: 2.84 (11th)

PP%: 29.2 (3rd)

PK%: 83.0 (8th)

Corsi (5-on-5): 53.8 (5th)

Toronto

Point%: .694 (2nd)

GF/G: 3.65 (3rd)

GA/G: 2.74 (6th)

PP%: 25.9 (7th)

PK%: 80.0 (14th)

Corsi (5-on-5): 49.92 (17th)

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Sportsnet.ca / Lightning hold no grudge towards John Tavares for choosing Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston | December 13, 2018, 3:29 PM

TAMPA, Fla. — John Tavares could have joined the Tampa Bay Lightning last summer. Just imagine how that would have shifted the balance of power in the Atlantic Division.

What made his decision to sign with the Toronto Maple Leafs sting even more for Lightning head coach Jon Cooper was how impressed with Tavares he was during Tampa's meeting with him at the Los Angeles-based offices of CAA Sports in the days leading up to July 1.

"What I learned is how thorough he was. That was one of the big things," Cooper said Thursday before the Lightning faced the Leafs. "When we went through that it wasn't the agents doing the talking, it was John (who) was doing the talking and he was asking appropriate questions. Not fluff. And it wasn't all just about hockey, it was about life and just different things like that.

"I thought he was pretty thorough."

That was a similar takeaway to the one San Jose Sharks coach Peter DeBoer gave recently about his team's meeting with Tavares. He had always been an admirer of the player's game, but came away with a stronger understanding of the person after spending a couple hours in a boardroom with him.

Tavares met with the brass of six teams — Toronto, Tampa, San Jose, Boston, Dallas and the New York Islanders, his former employer — before signing a \$77-million, seven-year contract to play for his hometown Leafs.

He probably wouldn't have received a deal that large if he came to the Lightning, but with no state tax in Florida a lower AAV would still have been palatable. Despite the impending cap crunch in Tampa, former general manager Steve Yzerman insisted to the Tavares camp that they would have been able to make it work.

The 28-year-old was pretty tempted, too, especially after a conversation with Lightning captain Steven Stamkos confirmed a lot of what he'd already thought about the merits of the organization.

"It definitely was very appealing, 100 per cent, they've got a quality hockey team and the results speak for themselves over the last number of years," said Tavares. "It was a reason why I wanted to meet with them."

Had he come here, the Lightning would have been able to roll out Stamkos, Tavares and Brayden Point as their top three centres. However, they've managed just fine without him — compiling the NHL's best record at 24-7-1 while scoring four goals per game.

Stamkos didn't play an active role in trying to woo Tavares, but he did share some of his own experience with him after testing free agency in 2016 before re-signing with the Lightning.

"When word got out that he was going to meet with Tampa, it just shows that we're a team that's obviously at the top of obviously great players' lists when it comes to wanting to come here and be part of this great organization," said Stamkos. "I don't think anyone's really thought of it since that day."

Well, maybe most of them haven't wondered what might have been. But Cooper has clearly imagined a world where Tavares wound up sitting on his bench instead of Toronto's on Thursday night.

He's been impressed with how quickly No. 91 has fit in with the Leafs after spending nine seasons with the Islanders.

"He's got darn near 20 goals, right? [Auston] Matthews goes down for a prolonged period and now you need somebody to carry a load and he's been the guy that's doing it," said Cooper.

Both of these teams have Stanley Cup aspirations and there's a decent chance they'll cross paths down the line in the playoffs.

So the Lightning will be seeing plenty of Tavares, one way or another.

"Were we upset that he didn't come here? Of course," said Cooper. "But you can't say he didn't make the right decision. He's having a hell of a year on a great team.

"I'm happy for him, he's a super guy. He's just a stand-up guy."

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets continue to win while searching for their 'best game'

Kristina Rutherford

WINNIPEG — Josh Morrissey had just sent Bell MTS Place into a tizzy after ripping the overtime winner under the glove of Cam Talbot, and then the defenceman pointed out a little something about his Winnipeg Jets.

"I think we still haven't found our absolute best game," Morrissey said, shoeless and from beneath the brim of a Jets ball cap, following a 5-4 win over the visiting Edmonton Oilers. "We had high aspirations for ourselves, and we wanted to come in and build off last season."

Well, maybe these Jets aren't feeling like they're at their finest just yet, but they sure are still finding ways to win, just like they did Thursday, and even after blowing a 3-1 lead. Winnipeg has now won eight of its last 11, this latest victory coming against an Oilers team that was riding a hot streak of its own, winners of seven of its last 10.

While Oilers captain Connor McDavid registered his whopping 300th career point Thursday night, the Jets spoiled the party.

And boy oh boy, did No. 97 ever come close to winning this thing, just after overtime began: McDavid came tearing down the ice after the opening faceoff, and he ripped one off the post.

"I mean, a lot of skilled players on the ice in overtime, obviously," Morrissey said, with a laugh.

It was Morrissey, 23, from Calgary, who deflected McDavid's next attempt on net, and then he chipped the puck up the wall. McDavid swung to his left and Morrissey took off up the left wing, while captain Blake Wheeler got the puck to Mark Scheifele, who dished it to the author of the game winner.

The decision to take off up the ice wasn't tough when he saw Wheeler take possession, Morrissey said. "When you're playing with those guys, they're gonna find you. That's kind of how I saw it, and it's nice to get that one."

It was, especially since the Jets blew a two-goal lead. As head coach Paul Maurice put it, it was "an unusual game," and "more of a slog up and down the ice."

The Oilers got on the board first, halfway through the opening frame, on a one-timer from Ryan Spooner, but the Jets answered with two of their own before the end of the period. Winnipeg first cashed in on a power play — Mathieu Perreault and his long brown locks cruised across the ice,



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then he fired a backhand top shelf — and then just over a minute later, a Nikolaj Ehlers intended pass deflected off a skate and in.

Patrik Laine made it 3-1 in the second, and you could tell the Finn was about to score his first of December and his 22nd of the season, just a couple seconds before it happened. Laine, who torched November with 18 goals in 12 games, hadn't scored in his last six. But the drought (it's all relative, right?) ended when Dustin Byfuglien fired a pass to Laine, who was wide open in the slot. And just like that, it was 3-1, Jets.

That lead wouldn't last, though. Darnell Nurse cut it to two after a McDavid-led rush saw the puck knock in off Nurse's skate, then Jujhar Khaira punched in a nice pass in front from Jesse Puljujarvi. The Oilers then reclaimed the lead with little more than a minute to go in the second, on a power-play goal that went like so: Draisaitl to McDavid to Alex Chiasson, for his career-high-tying 13th of the season.

But in the third, it was all Jets, and the third line in particular — centred by Adam Lowry — managed to shut down McDavid and Co., and limited Edmonton to just two shots. And then that tried and true Jets combination came through to tie things up: Wheeler threaded a pass from behind the net to a relatively open Scheifele, who hammered it home with about 10 minutes to go.

"When I have the puck, I'm looking for him," Wheeler said, of Scheifele. "That's the guy I want to pass to, so we've had some success doing it and continue to build off that."

When Morrissey saw those two had regained possession in the overtime frame, "I kind of just saw the open space and took off," he said.

And so, the Jets got it done yet again, and earned a third win in a row, even if they're not at their absolute best just yet.

"But we're definitely happy," Morrissey said, with a grin. "And we're definitely trending in the right direction."

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Oilers show fight but unable to hold on against Jets

Mark Spector | December 14, 2018, 12:18 AM

You've got to say it, this is a feisty Oilers club, a trait that — all by itself — marks a major improvement in Edmonton. But it's also thin on the back end, a manpower deficit that came home to roost in the third period Thursday night.

Down 3-1 on the road, against one of the NHL's premier clubs in the Winnipeg Jets — and missing two of their top four defencemen in Oscar Klefbom and Kris Russell — the Edmonton Oilers turned a 3-1 deficit into a 4-3 lead before losing in overtime, 5-4 to the Jets. They were outshot 17-2 in the third period, unable to break out of their own zone against the hard-charging Jets.

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Still, Edmonton was a Connor McDavid crossbar away from winning in overtime before Josh Morrissey rifled the winner past Cam Talbot seconds later. All in all, Edmonton brings home three of four points from a road trip through Denver and Winnipeg, with the Philadelphia Flyers awaiting tonight at Rogers Place.

You can't complain about this effort, regardless of the result. Here are our takeaways on a team that gets Philly, Vancouver and St. Louis in its next three games — a real chance to make some progress in the Pacific.

Call a Nurse...

...and send him to the intersection of Preparation and Opportunity.

We've often wondered what the offensive ceiling is for Darnell Nurse, and it looks like we're about to find out. With Oscar Klefbom on the shelf with a hand injury, Nurse steps on to the top of the No. 1 power-play unit, and moves in alongside Adam Larsson (28:45 Thursday) on the top pairing.

Effectively, Nurse becomes Edmonton's No. 1 defenceman — ready or not. In Winnipeg, he played 31:04, after playing 30:44 Tuesday in Colorado, where Klefbom was injured. However this works out, you've got to love Nurse's chutzpah in his first full game in the role.

He aptly handled the top power-play unit, played over 25 minutes at even strength and joined the rush to score a goal that bounced in off of his skate. He was not afraid to take his big frame to the opposing net in search of offence, a trait badly needed on this blue line.

With some experience in the role, it should only get better, no?

A Little Help, Please...?

Remember when Connor McDavid was setting a new NHL record for being in on each of the Oilers first nine goals of the season? Good times!

Well, suddenly he's getting some help, on an Oilers team that has scored 18 goals in its past four games.

Jujhar Khaira scored Thursday, and has six points in his last seven games. Alex Chiasson, in only his 26th game this season, scored his 13th goal to match a career high that was set in 79 games for Dallas five seasons ago. Ryan Spooner chipped in his second as an Oiler, while McDavid and Leon Draisaitl had two helpers apiece.

In their first eight games under Ken Hitchcock, Edmonton averaged two goals per game. In their past four, they're averaging 4.5 goals per game.

If they can manage to keep the goals against down while they're thin this on the blue line and keep the scoring up... Well, now you've got something.

Three for the Road

Right after the Oilers beat Minnesota 7-2 last Friday night, Hitchcock began looking forward to the next three games against Western powers Calgary, Colorado and Winnipeg.

"We'll find out a lot about ourselves in these three games," Hitchcock said.

So, let's take stock: A 1-0 win over the Flames; a 6-4 win in Denver, with two Avs goals in garbage time; and a 5-4 overtime loss in Winnipeg.

Five points out of a possible six is a pretty good run through three teams like that, complete with a 1-0 defensive struggle, outscoring the high-flying Avs and coming back from being down 3-1 at Winnipeg, where the Jets don't give many points away with a 12-4-2 mark on home ice.

Now, the trick will be to play this well against bottom-third teams like the Flyers, Canucks and Blues. The good teams? They don't let those points get away.

It would help to get defenceman Kris Russell back. They'll know more today on whether his injury is short- or long-term. If he can't play, will Caleb Jones get into the lineup on Friday?

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Sportsnet.ca / Seven potential trade destinations for Flyers Wayne Simmonds

Rory Boylen | December 13, 2018, 6:15 PM

With the NHL trade freeze getting closer, trade rumours are heating up with a few notable names being dangled about.

Last Saturday's Headlines segment on Hockey Night in Canada broached the topic of potential trades, and listed a number of teams linked to various potential deals as either buyers or sellers. Although December tends not to be a big trade month, with most of the GMs waiting for the new year and the trade deadline countdown before making any big splashes, the vibe this year seems to have the potential for some action.

On Wednesday we explored a few trade possibilities for St. Louis Blues defenceman Alex Pietrangolo who, even though he's not playing to the level we've come to expect just yet, is a No. 1 blueliner with a contract through 2019-20. Today we look at a much different kind of player.

Wayne Simmonds is known for his physicality, but he's also a very productive player for the Philadelphia Flyers. But he is on an expiring contract, which will impact the kind of a return the Flyers could get for him in trade — if they even elect to go that route.

"I'm not sure (Chuck Fletcher has) decided yet what he's going to do with Wayne Simmonds," Brian Burke said on Sportsnet the FAN 590's Starting Lineup on Wednesday. "He's an extremely valuable player. He's a throwback player, plays hard, fights, and goes to the net. I'm not sure they've made a decision internally on what to do with him yet."

Simmonds's future with the Flyers is believed to have been part of the divide between former GM Ron Hextall and upper management. On Nov. 30 Hextall was asked about how contract negotiations with Simmonds were going and he told reporters that he hadn't talked to the player's side in nearly a month. And even when they were talking, Hextall said the two sides weren't close on anything.

"I don't know how that was gonna play out," Hextall said. "Sometimes you've got to have a deadline for those things. Whether it would have been the trade deadline or the end of the year, June 30, I don't know how that would have played out. There was a comfort level for us and a comfort level for them. We were a ways apart."

Chuck Fletcher on a trade:

"If I call around and something makes sense and there's a fit with another team, I'll do it. I'm not looking to do something just to say I did it. I want to do something that helps the team and we're still trying to figure out where we need the help."

— John Boruk (@johnborukNBCS) December 12, 2018

If Simmonds becomes available teams would surely be lining up to acquire him. Given his contract situation, though, the market is likely only limited to playoff and Stanley Cup hopefuls. He's also got a modified no-trade clause in which he can submit a list of 12 teams he won't accept a trade to, according to CapFriendly. With all that considered, here are seven potential destinations.

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

Simmonds' hometown team has most loudly been connected to him. Many view Toronto's lineup as one that needs to add a level of grit if they are to last four rounds in the playoffs. But as Elliotte Friedman noted in 31 Thoughts this week, GM Kyle Dubas has heard these critiques about both of his previous teams, and with the Marlies and OHL Greyhounds he stayed the course with an overwhelming amount of sheer talent.

What makes Simmonds interesting in this case, though, is that he's not just a sub-10 minute one-dimensional player good for only throwing his

weight and knuckles around. Simmonds can produce. He is tied for the Flyers lead in power-play goals on the season with two, and his eight even-strength goals are just one off the team-high pace. He is a minus player and Philadelphia's shot and expected goal rates with him on the ice are in the negative, but that could be more a cause of a struggling team.

He's also taking a few more penalties than he's drawing so far, but if he could turn that into a positive in Toronto to get their power play on the ice a little bit more, there's some extreme value in adding someone like Simmonds.

BUFFALO SABRES

Also in 31 Thoughts, Friedman noted that the Sabres likely weren't in the market to trade a first-round pick for a rental player, but if the price for Simmonds is a little less than that and perhaps closer to what they gave up for Jeff Skinner, would they move on it?

The Sabres have scored 92 goals this season, with 48 of those coming off the sticks of Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Jason Pominville and Sam Reinhart, all of whom have spent time on that top line. Pominville hasn't scored once since moving down to the second unit.

There is a dire need for secondary scoring on this team right now. Since Buffalo's 10-game winning streak ended they have managed just one win in six games and have gotten only four goals from players outside of the top line in that span. Maybe this support will come from Casey Mittelstadt in the second half of his rookie season, or Conor Sheary can find some level of consistency, but if that doesn't improve soon it could push the Sabres into action.

When Andrew Berkshire explored how real the Sabres were two weeks ago, he found some troubling trends, notably that they didn't get many high quality chances down low. They may not need those kind of chances for their top snipers to find the back of the net, but beyond Skinner and Eichel it seems they need to get a bit dirtier to create opportunities. This is where Simmonds, with no fear of crashing the net and working the cycle, could be a player with considerable impact.

But with the Sabres still climbing the ladder and figuring out how much staying power they have, it's all about price. With Skinner also up for a new contract this summer, Buffalo management will be careful not to do what the Senators did following their trip to the Eastern Conference final and make a big move before the team was ready for the plunge.

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

Given the unclear futures of both of their big pending UFAs Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin, Columbus may decide to go all-in on this season and if they do, Simmonds wouldn't be a bad fit.

One of the better stories in Columbus has been the play of Josh Anderson, who has scored 12 goals (with just three assists) from the second line this season. The winger had a scary incident on Tuesday night in Vancouver where he crashed head-first into the goal post. After initially being listed as day-to-day, it looks like he shouldn't miss any time.

#CBJ Josh Anderson skates this morning and is likely to play tonight vs. #LAKings. Nothing official yet from the club.

— Aaron Portzline (@Aportzline) December 13, 2018

Although the Jackets are a top-10 offence so far, their scoring depth will be tested as the season goes along. Trading for Simmonds would provide Columbus with an upgrade on the third line, a role he currently fills in Philadelphia, playing Anthony Duclair — who is now a healthy scratch — or Oliver Bjorkstrand.

Columbus' power play also ranks 25th in the league and Simmonds could help there — over the past three seasons, only Alex Ovechkin and Patrik Laine have scored more power-play goals than Simmonds.

BOSTON BRUINS



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Whenever a player of Simmonds' ilk becomes available, the Boston Bruins are destined to be linked.

With a style of play that is slowly withering away in an evolving league, Simmonds is a dying breed of player that embodies the traditional notion of 'Bruins Hockey.' After Boston again dominated the rival Maple Leafs on Saturday, they could make the challenge even greater for the Blue and White by a) taking a player off the market they may desire and b) adding another element of physical play and defensive capability that Toronto has struggled to match up against already with the Bruins.

Although Simmonds is a versatile player fit for many roles, he's a winger through and through and you could easily say centre is Boston's biggest area of need. In that sense, if they swing big, Jeff Carter may be a more likely fit. But still, with Zdeno Chara's time running out, banged up Patrice Bergeron in his age 33 season, and Brad Marchand entering his 30s, Boston may be inclined to push some chips in and load up. The only thing in their way then would be cap room, of which they have roughly \$4 million.

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.

ANAHEIM DUCKS

GM Bob Murray recently signed an extension that'll take him through the 2021-22 season and he hasn't been shy to talk about his team's deficiencies and his desire to improve this roster. The Ducks are regularly outshot and out chanced, arguably in a playoff position only because of the stellar play from netminder John Gibson. But even after acquiring 21-year-old Daniel Sprong, who was drafted as a scorer but has just one goal this season, Murray doesn't seem to be done dealing.

"Definitely actively looking to improve," Murray told the media after signing his extension. "Scoring is up in the game again. It seems we're going through another era like in the 1980s where there were lots of goals. We brought in Daniel [Sprong] because he likes to shoot and score. That doesn't mean we're stopping there. We have to find ways to score more goals. It's a problem. The power play is an issue."

Anaheim has the 24th-ranked man advantage on the season, but it's been falling since Nov. 1. Simmonds' scoring prowess on the power play was noted above, but it's also worth mentioning that his physical style would play well in the Western Conference and, specifically, the Pacific Division.

COLORADO AVALANCHE

With one of the best lines in the league and the top two individual scorers, some of the Avalanche's shortcomings have been patched by the supremacy of the Rantanen-MacKinnon-Landeskog combo. When you look outside of the Rocky Mountain Line, their third- and fourth-line centres (Carl Soderberg and Colin Wilson) are the two next-highest scorers and the only second liner with more than four goals is JT Compher with seven.

Now that Compher is at centre on that line, bumping Tyson Jost to the wing, it might be time to find him some better scoring support. If the cost doesn't become too onerous for a team with plenty of young players still on the way as they build towards a brighter future, Simmonds would not only instantly become the fourth-highest goal-getter on this team upon arrival, but he'd add a veteran quality as well.

DALLAS STARS

Many expected that returning Russian Valeri Nichushkin would eventually take on a second line scorer role with the Stars, but instead, he's been in and out of the lineup and hasn't scored a goal yet this season.

For now, Devin Shore and Brett Ritchie are flanking Jason Spezza on the second line, but neither of them are sure-things and have combined for just six goals on the season. In fact, of all teams striving for a playoff spot, Dallas is one of those that relies on its top line the most.

No forward outside of the Big Three in Dallas has more than five goals on the season — and of the three who have scored five, none have converted in December yet. It's a real issue for this team, and putting Simmonds on a line with Spezza would add some much-needed muscle and an upside for goals that is completely absent right now.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing how Ken Hitchcock has changed the Edmonton Oilers

Andrew Berkshire December 13, 2018, 10:49 AM

Whenever a team makes a coaching replacement in the middle of a season, it's always a little tough to evaluate the changes the new coach brings in. Some things are more obvious to the eye than numbers would indicate, and sometimes changes are made that are so small you need the numbers to understand the impact.

With the lack of practices in the NHL now, and without the benefit of a training camp to implement stylistic and system changes, it's all the more difficult for an incoming coach to put their stamp on a team.

It's been about three weeks since the Edmonton Oilers moved on from Todd McLellan and hired Ken Hitchcock, so it's probably unfair to draw any conclusions about where things are headed for the Oilers. But perhaps we can get a bit of a feeling of what Hitchcock wants to change.

Starting with performance, the Oilers have been one of the hottest teams in the league since the coaching change, going 8-2-1 in 11 games, but how much of that is due to improved play? Let's look at Edmonton's 5-on-5 numbers before and after the coaching change.

Looking at the shot differentials so far isn't that illuminating in terms of changes Hitchcock is trying to make, though it does show that not all the signs so far are good.

The Oilers have gone from a pretty strong team at controlling high danger chances to being outplayed from that area of the ice. At the same time, they've slightly increased their differential in scoring chances on net, shots, and shot attempts, even though their overall scoring chance and pass to the slot differentials have taken a hit.

The big difference in scoring chances on net and scoring chance differentials hint that there's more of a focus on blocking shots. An increase in blocked scoring chances from 3.72 per 60 minutes under McLellan to 4.65 under Hitchcock may sound small, but it's a fairly significant margin.

What appears to be the case on the surface is that Hitchcock has switched from a style that favoured shot quality a bit more to controlling shot volume, which is basically the opposite of what he tried to do in Dallas.

To get a better idea of what the changes are, let's look at the specific area Hitchcock is most associated with: defensive play.

The Oilers have been producing far fewer quality chances themselves in the games since Hitchcock took over, but that seems to be a tradeoff in order to cut down on the chances against.

Not only are the Oilers giving up fewer opportunities across the board, the types of chances they're allowing are also less dangerous.

Under McLellan, the chances the Oilers were giving up were preceded by a controlled zone entry, a pass, or a mistake caused by a forechecking play that resulted in a change of possession 87.1 per cent of the time.



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Under Hitchcock, that number drops down to a flat 78 per cent, meaning not only are the Oilers' goaltenders dealing with fewer chances, those chances are of lower quality as well.

That's likely a big reason why Cam Talbot and Mikko Koskinen are boasting .925 and .936 save percentages since Hitchcock took over, as opposed to the .888 and .917 marks they had under McLellan.

Those are some big differences in save percentage and likely a lot more than can be expected based on the change in shot quality. But the early positive results go a long way towards getting players to buy in to what Hitchcock is selling — winning is a great cure-all.

The significant drop in offensive play at 5-on-5 is probably temporary, and having the ability to throw Connor McDavid on the ice 20 or more minutes per game is a good way to counteract it. But if the Oilers start to struggle to score, the defensive improvement may not matter much with the poor differentials they're currently putting forth.

Other changes the Oilers have implemented under Hitchcock include:

- an increased rate in dump-outs from the defensive zone, which account for 23 per cent of their zone exits now, up from 20.5 per cent under McLellan.
- a similar increase in dumps-ins to the offensive zone, which account for 55.1 per cent of their zone entries now, up from 53.7 per cent under McLellan.

The goal to increase the number of dump-outs and dump-ins may be an effort to curb the Oilers' turnover rates in the defensive zone. They've seen a drop from 39.6 turnovers in the defensive zone per 60 minutes under McLellan to 34.7 under Hitchcock, and a drop from 12.1 to 10.6 in the neutral zone.

Considering that the Oilers have typically struggled to defend, it makes some level of sense for Hitchcock to try and curb some of the more dangerous plays in favour of safer ones.

Whether all these small changes result in any long-term improvements for the Oilers is up for debate, but it hasn't taken long for Hitchcock to start putting his stamp on the team.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames await news on Smith without comfortable backup options

Eric Francis | December 13, 2018, 5:50 PM

CALGARY – The last time Mike Smith got injured, it led to the ultimate undoing of the Calgary Flames.

Surely the team's playoff fate doesn't hang on his health status like it did last year.

We may be about to find out.

Smith was evaluated by doctors Thursday after the 36-year-old essentially pulled himself from Wednesday's dramatic overtime win over Philadelphia.

Coach Bill Peters was informed late in the second intermission of Thursday's wild comeback that Smith "wasn't right" and needed to be replaced by David Rittich.

Smith didn't return to the bench for the third, nor was he made available after the game.

Team brass was tight-lipped Thursday, but a source familiar with the situation said early indications suggest Smith's injury isn't serious.

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He said more would be known Friday, a sentiment echoed by GM Brad Treliving.

The assumption is Smith tweaked something in his mid-section as he did last February, but it's hard to say.

On Wednesday there was a collision with Rasmus Andersson in the second period that sent Smith flying into his net, which could have done the damage.

Or perhaps the awkward fourth goal he let in – the only questionable one of the night on him – caused an injury as he folded awkwardly while trying in vain to stop Dale Weise's long shot.

Smith missed the drama that punctuated the Flames' 6-5 overtime win, and the team is bracing for the possibility he may miss more going forward.

The Flames were given the day off Thursday and Smith was one of the only players who did not attend the Flames annual wheelchair hockey game at the Alberta Children's Hospital.

He's not the type of person who would typically miss something like that without extenuating circumstances.

There was no announcement of a call-up to replace Smith, but that would generally be announced early Friday, once the farmhand arrives for practice.

That's where things get scary, as it's the one position the Flames aren't deep in.

Pre-season standout Tyler Parsons is still injured, so the two options in Stockton include Jon Gillies and Nick Schneider.

The 24-year-old Gillies has struggled to a 5-8-1 record with a 3.96 goals-against average and horrific .861 save percentage.

He got 11 of his 12 games of NHL experience here last year during Smith's injury, going 3-5-1 with a 2.88 GAA while the team fell from the playoff perch Smith put them in as a first-half all-star.

After joining the Flames in China the 21-year-old Schneider started this season in the East Coast league before the Parsons injury saw him promoted.

The former Calgary Hitmen starter has been good in the AHL where he is 6-2 with a 2.66 GAA and .915 save percentage. He has yet to make his NHL debut.

The plan certainly wouldn't be for either one to get much NHL work in if their promotion was a short one.

Rittich can handle the three games in four nights starting in Minnesota Saturday.

However, if Smith's injury lasts upwards of a month like it did last year, Rittich will clearly have to be spelled off at times.

Undoubtedly management, teammates and the fans are more optimistic the 26-year-old Czech character is capable of faring far better as a starter this year than last when he was a raw rookie.

After all, many have been clamoring for him to be anointed the starter throughout the young season.

He's certainly earned that chance.

Still, skeptics will point to how dramatically his game turned last year once starting responsibilities were dumped on his shoulders.



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Even he admitted he didn't handle that pressure well, but vowed to learn from it.

Not surprisingly, the happy-go-lucky netminder says the key is having fun, and keeping it light.

That should be easier in a dressing room full of youth and a winning spirit that makes it as loose an environment as the Dome has seen in decades.

With a 9-3-1 record this year and 2.31 GAA to match, Rittich has passed almost every test thrown his way, including a game-saving stop on Ivan Provorov who barrelled in alone on the Flames net mere seconds into overtime Wednesday, setting the stage for Johnny Gaudreau's emotional winner.

Clearly the coach has no problem handing the reins to Rittich – he did as much last Sunday when he gave Rittich the start in Edmonton for what was then the biggest game of the year.

He responded well, as he has all season.

Just like last year, the timing of Smith's latest setback is less than ideal.

It was Feb. 11 when Smith was mere seconds away from capping a 9-3 stretch in Brooklyn when he pulled something in his mid-section.

When he returned a month later, Rittich and Gillies had faltered, the team was decimated by injuries and his return only seemed to make things worse.

This year Smith seemed to have overcome his early confidence issues with six wins in a row and was solid Thursday outside of the long shot he whiffed on by Weise.

Only an injury or illness was going to prevent the 36-year-old from fighting back for a win.

After the bad goal, a Bronx cheer following a save on a 150-foot shot prompted him to seemingly acknowledge the crowd by holding up his arm and stick following their reaction.

He's been the subject of endless debate for two seasons now.

It has to be good news that Smith's ailment was such that he hoped trainers could help him work through it in the intermission before finally alerting Rittich he was going in with three minutes left in the break.

We'll know more Friday when the Flames practice before jetting off to Minnesota.

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TSN.CA / Formenton awaits further testing as Team Canada holds its breath

Mark Masters

TSN reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on Team Canada, which held an off-ice workout (game players) and practice (scratches) at the Q Centre in Victoria ahead of tonight's scrimmage against the U Sports all-stars.

Alex Formenton is undergoing further testing to determine the extent of his right knee injury.

"Alex is upbeat, obviously a little more than he was last night," said Shawn Bullock, Hockey Canada's director of men's national teams. "He's

in good spirits today and excited to get in for further examination so we know exactly what we're dealing with."

The speedy winger, one of just two returning players at the camp, sustained the injury in overtime of last night's scrimmage. He was spotted on crutches and wearing a knee brace on Thursday.

"That's standard protocol," Bullock said, "to stay off of it until we get all the examinations done."

TSN Hockey insider Bob McKenzie has more on Formenton's suspected knee sprain and what it means to the team here:

No prognosis yet on Formenton's injury

Alex Formenton was seen wearing a knee brace and was on crutches at practice on Thursday after injuring his right leg taking a hit in Wednesday's exhibition game. Team Canada is still waiting for an update on the severity of his injury. Bob McKenzie discusses the chances of Formenton being ready to play in two weeks.

A couple of other injured forwards, Gabe Vilardi and Jaret Anderson-Dolan, both skated on Thursday. It was the third straight day on the ice for both Los Angeles Kings prospects.

Vilardi has been dealing with a nagging back issue and has only suited up in four games this season, all on a recent AHL conditioning stint. He was a late scratch over the weekend when he was scheduled to skate in a fifth game.

"It's certainly an injury that he's been dealing with for some time, but I think he's feeling more comfortable," said Bullock. "No timelines on Gabe, to be quite frank with you. We don't know when he'll play. We continue to make sure he feels more comfortable on the ice and is progressing in the right direction."

Vilardi wore a regular red sweater and took part in drills with the other players at practice on Thursday.

Anderson-Dolan, who broke his wrist in a game with Spokane on Oct. 27, did some light shooting while wearing a blue no-contact sweater.

"We just want to make sure we're a little more cautious with that one," Bullock explained. "Obviously, it's a little bit tender ... The first day was stick-handling, second day was stick-handling, passing and today was getting into a little bit of shooting."

WJC Ice Chips: Vilardi, Anderson-Dolan inching toward return

Los Angeles Kings prospects' Gabe Vilardi and Jaret Anderson-Dolan are both dealing with injuries and won't suit up for Canada's exhibition game tonight. Mark Masters has more on their recovery and why Hockey Canada won't be rushing them back.

Michael "Mikey" DiPietro appears to be the early frontrunner in the race to be Canada's starting goalie on Boxing Day. A final cut at the selection camp last year, Hockey Canada helped DiPietro prepare for this moment by inviting him to the senior World Championship last spring as the third goalie. While in Denmark he roomed with then Maple Leafs back-up Curtis McElhinney. The veteran netminder offered some insight on what it takes to handle the pressure of a hockey-mad market.

"Sometimes you can see yourself reading into a lot of things and kind of forgetting just to play so, for myself, it's just focusing on my game and the ice and try to block out the outside noise and he definitely gave me strategies for that," DiPietro said. "Obviously, limiting social media. I did it by deleting Instagram and I just have Twitter and I really don't go on it during the camp and throughout tournament."

McElhinney thrived as Toronto's backup goalie last season despite making almost all his starts on the second night of a back-to-back set. The struggle to stay sharp at all times is something he spoke to DiPietro about. For example, McElhinney replaced Frederik Andersen early in Game 2 of last season's playoff series against Boston after the Bruins got off to a quick start at TD Garden.



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"That was a tough situation and he kind of battled through it," DiPietro said. "That's all you can really do is take it one puck at a time and that's something he does really well in his game and that's something I can translate into my game and build on."

Crease competition in the spotlight for Canada tonight

As Canada takes on the U Sports All-Stars for the second straight night Thursday, the competition in the crease takes centre stage. Michael DiPietro and Ian Scott are the front runners for the starting goalie spot and will battle head-to-head looking to keep their names atop the depth chart for Canada. Bob McKenzie joins Mark Masters to discuss this and more ahead of tonight's tune-up.

DiPietro has strong numbers this season with a 12-7-1 record and .922 save percentage, but his main competition in camp has been even better. Prince Albert's Ian Scott leads the WHL with a 23-2-1 record and .943 save percentage.

Scott, an unsigned Maple Leafs draft pick, played one game in the AHL with the Marlies last season on a tryout and was able to stay with the team throughout its Calder Cup run. Scott describes that as "huge for my development" and he remains in touch with the goaltending battery of Leafs backup Garret Sparks and Calvin Pickard, now with the Arizona Coyotes. In fact, they spoke recently. Did the World Juniors come up?

"No, not World-Junior related," he said before smiling sheepishly, "just about my goal."

That's right, things are going so well for Scott this season he actually chipped in on offence scoring into an empty net.

"Actually when I was there (with the Marlies), the first game I watched, Pickard went for the empty net and he missed. I told him I remembered that," Scott said with a chuckle.

So, what did he see on his goal?

"Kind of a blur, to be honest. I tried it the day before and it went too high and hit the scoreboard so I was joking around with my coach before the next game and I said, 'Maybe it just has to be a bullet through the middle of the ice,' and it worked."

Scott wasn't invited to Canada's summer camp for World Junior hopefuls, but has made big strides since attending the 2017 Program of Excellence goalie camp.

"I'm a lot calmer in the net," the six-foot-three Calgary native explained, "a little more confident too. Just confident with the base of my game that I can always resort back to. If things get a little bit tough I'm able to regroup and go back to what I feel comfortable with and build from there again."

What's the base of his game?

"Just making sure I'm relaxed and big. If I'm playing big, my confidence level goes up from there and I think just being attached to the game too. Making sure I'm talking to my D and getting out for pucks and stuff like that."

Scott will get a big test tonight as he's slated to play the full scrimmage for the U Sports team.

Scott on what he learned being around during the Marlies' Calder Cup run

Leafs prospect Ian Scott played one game for the Marlies last season, but was around the team during the Calder Cup run. After his 18-save performance against the U Sports All-Stars Wednesday, he spoke about that experience, and was asked if Garret Sparks and Calvin Pickard have been in touch regarding the World Juniors. Scott said they did get in touch, but only wanted to talk about his goal in the WHL.

Jack Studnicka was the big offensive star in the first scrimmage against the U Sports all-stars on Wednesday potting a pair of goals. With Patrice Bergeron banged up, the Bruins prospect got a chance to play on a line with Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak during the NHL pre-season.

"On and off the ice the way they prepare for games is unbelievable," he gushed. "You really, it's kind of weird, but you're watching them 24/7 and try to pick up things they do."

Anything surprise him?

"Pasta – when he's not going (well) he squats before the game and I've never really heard about that. It's light, but just something to get his legs going. So, if I feel like my legs aren't going I'll maybe throw a couple weights on the rack and do some squats."

Studnicka was among the standouts at the summer camp doing a good job against Jack Hughes and the top American line in the final game.

"Definitely the Showcase gives me some confidence," he said. "I was trusted to play against such high-skill players. So, confidence was built there and trying to bring it in here."

Studnicka will get another big chance to impress the coaching staff tonight as he is one of seven forwards playing for the second straight day.

Studnicka hoping Pastrnak's squat routine will work for him

Bruins prospect Jack Studnicka discusses his big night against the U Sports All-Stars Wednesday, explains that he learned a lot by being around Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak in the NHL pre-season, and says whenever Pasta isn't feeling it, he will do squats before the game to get his legs going.

Projected Team Canada lineup for Thursday's scrimmage against U Sports all-stars:

Comtois-Glass-Tippett

Hayton-Veleno-Frost

Foudy-Dellandrea-Lavoie

Ratcliffe-Studnicka-Entwistle

Scratches: Formenton (knee), Suzuki, Leason, Vilardi (back), Anderson-Dolan (wrist), Lafrenière, Bowers

Brook-Bouchard

Joseph-Crotty

Phillips-Addison

Mitchell

Scratches: Smith, Dobson, Beaudin, Bernard-Docker, McLissac

Canada goalies: DiPietro, Villalta

U Sports goalie: Scott

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TSN.CA / Leafs say plenty at stake versus Lightning

Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto reporter Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Tampa Bay Lightning held an optional morning



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skate at 10:30 a.m. at Amalie Arena, followed by the Leafs' optional morning skate.

If the Leafs want to eventually be the NHL's best team, they have to measure themselves against the best. In part, that's what Thursday night is all about.

Toronto will meet its division rival in Tampa for the first time this season, sitting second to them in the NHL standings. At a juncture where both teams are mostly healthy and playing well, it's the perfect opportunity for the Leafs to assess how close their ultimate goal might be.

"It's a big one. There's no question about it," said Morgan Rielly after the Leafs' optional morning skate on Thursday. "We're looking at the standings all the time. We know where they are, we know what they're up to. They're playing well. It's a good challenge for us. We have to be ready. I think there will be a little extra juice just because of what's at stake."

The Lightning have been the hotter of these two teams lately, winning seven straight and boasting an NHL-best plus-39 goal differential. Toronto hasn't been as strong since inserting Auston Matthews and William Nylander back into the lineup in recent weeks, but a 4-1 win over Carolina on Tuesday has them trending in the right direction.

"You're going to find out a lot here tonight," said Mike Babcock. "So [we'll] watch them play, try to get the right people on the ice and see what happens and see where you have to go. [Tampa is] setting the standard for the league right now and we'd like to, so we'll see what happens."

Babcock said for all the video Toronto watches on high-calibre opponents like the Lightning, there's nothing that truly prepares for their speed and pace up close. The Leafs have a strong speed game of their own and a comparably high-powered offence, so the tilt could lead to an explosion of goals. Playing from the back end out might be a better strategy, though.

"I anticipate a really fast-paced, great game where I think everyone is talking about the offence," said Steven Stamkos, "but usually when you're playing a big game like this you try to focus on doing the right things defensively first, and we'll see how it plays out."

"When you play a team that's this good, you're a bit cautious going into it," added Rielly. "Might be nerves, might be not wanting to make any mistakes, and that can sometimes lead to not quite the outburst people expect. But you never really know. We'll be ready one way or another and we're looking forward to it."

One player who has been especially integral to the Leafs' offensive success so far is John Tavares, who leads the team with 19 goals. Tampa was one of the clubs Tavares met with during his free agency last summer, but passed on the Lightning for the Leafs.

"Were we upset he didn't come here? Of course. But you can't say he didn't make the right decision," said Lightning coach Jon Cooper. "He's having a hell of a season on a great team. So, [I'm] happy for him."

- Good news for the Lightning, bad news for the Leafs: Andrei Vasilevskiy will make his return to the starters' net for Tampa on Thursday after sitting out since Nov. 10 with a foot injury.

"Feels great [he's back]," said Stamkos. "He's been our MVP for a long time here on this team. I know it was tough for him to watch all those games. We [just] can't have that let down now that he's back. ... We can't just think he's back and he has it covered. He does most of the time, but we'll look to continue playing the right way."

In Vasilevskiy's absence, backup Louis Domingue stepped in and produced a 11-3-0 record, which helped keep the Lightning on track while Vasilevskiy got healthy.

A finalist for the Vezina Trophy last season, Vasilevskiy was off to a terrific start before getting hurt, going 9-3-1 with a .927 save percentage.

Coming back against the Leafs could help the netminder pick up where he left off – Vasilevskiy is 7-4-1 against the Leafs since 2014-15, with a .917 save percentage and 2.44 goals-against average.

"He's a good goalie, we're going to have to be on the net," said Babcock, "and find some second chances and get traffic there so he doesn't see everything."

If the Lightning work their game plan properly, those chances Toronto generates will be few and far between. Tampa allows 31.2 shots on goal per game, 14th fewest in the NHL, which was an important factor in their success without Vasilevskiy between the pipes.

"Vasy is Vasy, he's going to be a Vezina-quality goalie every year, [but] nothing should really change for us," said Stamkos. "I think we've done a good job of limiting chances and we're going to have to really do that tonight against an offensive team with the firepower that Toronto has."

Maple Leafs projected lines vs. Lightning:

Forwards

Brown-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Kadri-Nylander

Lindholm-Gauthier-Ennis

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Goaltenders

Andersen

Sparks

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TSN.CA / Leafs respect Lightning, but won't overthink season's first meeting

Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto reporter Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team held a noon practice at Ice Sports Forum in Brandon, Fla., on Wednesday.

In the grand scheme of Toronto's 82-game schedule, Thursday's contest against the Tampa Bay Lightning is simply the first time divisional rivals will clash this season. That the Lightning also happen to be perched atop the NHL standings, with the Maple Leafs sitting second, isn't a storyline Toronto's players and head coach are interested in wading far into. Nor are they already looking ahead to a potential playoff meeting down the road.

"It gives you guys something to talk about," said centre Nazem Kadri after the Leafs' practice on Wednesday. "We're going to give them all the credit in the world but we want to go out there and beat them [tomorrow]. Our division is just pretty deadly at this point...we're going to have to go



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through those teams [like Tampa] regardless, that's the way we look at it."

Leafs head coach Mike Babcock has made a concerted effort since training camp to keep his team's focus on the here and now, not letting any outside expectations influence how the Leafs see themselves. That's the same strategy he's employing ahead of what could be Toronto's biggest test of the season to date.

"I'm trying to win every night," he shrugged. "Instead of worrying 100 games down the road or what the schedule is or what the next back-to-back is, I know we play Tampa, so we're getting ready to play Tampa. Ideally all the rest of that stuff works itself out."

Several Leafs players, including John Tavares and Patrick Marleau, lamented the NHL's playoff seeding system, where divisional opponents are pitted against one another in the first round as opposed to the former more traditional method, which put the first seed against the eighth, and so forth.

But even if April was just around the corner, and the prospect of seeing the Lightning in a postseason round was not so far removed from Thursday's task, Babcock wouldn't be getting caught up in uncontrollable decisions.

"If we just stay in the process and focus on getting better and cleaning up our details and improving our players, then things look after themselves," he reiterated. "In the end, what are you going to do? Wherever you end up, you're excited to be in the playoffs and excited for the opportunity."

Until that time, Toronto is taking stock of a high-powered Tampa team that, in many ways, is a mirror of the Leafs. Tampa's goal-differential (plus-39) is the only one higher than Toronto's (plus-28) in the NHL, and they average a league-high four goals per game (compared to 3.65 by the Leafs).

"[They have a] lot of depth. They can obviously score at will, too, kind of like us," said Auston Matthews. "Lot of speed. You want to stay disciplined against them, they have a good power play and they've been obviously very hot lately, probably the top team in the league right now. So it'll be a really good test for us tomorrow."

The start of this season has been unique for Kadri. He didn't score his first goal of the season until the Leafs' 10th game, and hasn't had consistent linemates or a consistent matchup assignment like in years past.

So the fact that Kadri, who tallied 30-plus goals in each of his last two seasons, has only eight goals and 17 points through 31 outings this year isn't shocking to Babcock.

"When we have more depth on our roster, more guys have people to play with," Babcock explained. "[Matthews] and [Tavares], we gave them more help right from the get-go, and I don't want to say [Kadri's] by himself, but it wasn't the same kind of experience and the same kind of players [on his line]. Now, he seems to be coming around."

Babcock said Tuesday's 4-1 win over the Carolina Hurricanes was among Kadri's best games of the season. He tallied one assist in the outing, bringing his point total in the last 13 games to four (one goal, three helpers). For a player who thrives on scoring as much as Kadri has in the past, he's comfortable with his role now, even if the offensive output is comparatively lower so far than before.

"I know the value I bring to this team," he said. "We have a lot of talented players. That's what you need in order to win a championship, so we're nothing but excited. I don't need a pat on the back every single day; I just go about my business."

Most recently, Kadri has been settling in on a line with Marleau and the newly returned William Nylander. While Kadri detailed a number of ways that line could start generating more scores ("our forecheck has been

good and gives us more time and space"), his teammates see a lot more being offered nightly by Kadri than just goals.

"Naz is very consistent," said Tavares. "Competes really hard, gets in people's faces, can agitate a bit and he's got great finish, touch and hockey sense out there. [He's a] guy that can do a lot for us, and his ability to mix it up and especially when you need that guy to go out there and provide a spark physically or kind of turn up the tension a little bit so to speak, he brings a lot of that for us."

"I don't think there are too many players who are tough like him," added Matthews, "who like to get under guys' skin and are as skilled, can score, can do what he does. So you get the best of both worlds from him. He brings the competitive presence to the locker room and it's definitely a guy you love to have on your team and probably hate to play against."

For the last decade, the Leafs have rounded up team dads – to players, coaches and staff – and schlepped them out on the road for a couple of games to offer them a taste of NHL life. For the first time this year, it's the Leafs' moms who will get the experience, joining the team in South Florida for games against the Lightning on Thursday and Florida Panthers on Saturday.

"For these guys to have some time to say thanks on this trip and spend some time is a special thing," said Babcock, who lost his own mother to cancer. "I've been in the league a long time, had a lot of dads' trips, this is the first moms' trip; I think it will be great."

Indeed, the trip felt like a long time coming for some of the Leafs' moms as well.

"In my career in the NHL we've never gotten the opportunity to do this and she's been asking for years, every single year. We did what we could for her," Kadri said. "My mother means a lot to me, she's been my rock since day one."

Kadri went on to say how different his parents were in shepherding him as a young hockey player, calling his dad "the realist" while his mother was more positive. It's a familiar dynamic, cropping up in many Leafs' reflections on their formative years around the game.

"She wasn't too hands-on [with hockey], she was just supportive," Matthews said of his mom. "Anything I needed, anything I would do, she was always right there supporting me. I know it's [different] than the role my dad played, but I think it was just as big. I think it's going to be fun for her to see what we do on the road."

"My mom was a school teacher, but she would stay home with my brother and sister and let my dad go on the road with me for all the games on the weekends," shared Marleau. "Not all the time, but a lot of the time. So she had to pull double duty doing all the school work and then doing all the chores on the farm."

An extra bit of good fortune for the Leafs' moms is they've drawn a warmer destination than the fathers have in recent years. The Leafs' last two fathers' trips have included stops in Boston, New York and Washington – all during winter months.

"I know my mom; she's not a fan of the cold weather," Matthews said. "So for her to come to the warm weather, I think she's kind of got the bragging rights on the dads right now."

Maple Leafs lines at practice:

Forwards

Brown-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Kadri-Nylander

Lindholm-Gauthier-Ennis



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2018

Suspended: Hyman

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Marincin-Holl

Goaltenders

Andersen

Sparks

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TSN.CA / Leafs say plenty at stake versus Lightning

Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto reporter Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Tampa Bay Lightning held an optional morning skate at 10:30 a.m. at Amalie Arena, followed by the Leafs' optional morning skate.

If the Leafs want to eventually be the NHL's best team, they have to measure themselves against the best. In part, that's what Thursday night is all about.

Toronto will meet its division rival in Tampa for the first time this season, sitting second to them in the NHL standings. At a juncture where both teams are mostly healthy and playing well, it's the perfect opportunity for the Leafs to assess how close their ultimate goal might be.

"It's a big one. There's no question about it," said Morgan Rielly after the Leafs' optional morning skate on Thursday. "We're looking at the standings all the time. We know where they are, we know what they're up to. They're playing well. It's a good challenge for us. We have to be ready. I think there will be a little extra juice just because of what's at stake."

The Lightning have been the hotter of these two teams lately, winning seven straight and boasting an NHL-best plus-39 goal differential. Toronto hasn't been as strong since inserting Auston Matthews and William Nylander back into the lineup in recent weeks, but a 4-1 win over Carolina on Tuesday has them trending in the right direction.

"You're going to find out a lot here tonight," said Mike Babcock. "So [we'll] watch them play, try to get the right people on the ice and see what happens and see where you have to go. [Tampa is] setting the standard for the league right now and we'd like to, so we'll see what happens."

Babcock said for all the video Toronto watches on high-calibre opponents like the Lightning, there's nothing that truly prepares for their speed and pace up close. The Leafs have a strong speed game of their own and a comparably high-powered offence, so the tilt could lead to an explosion of goals. Playing from the back end out might be a better strategy, though.

"I anticipate a really fast-paced, great game where I think everyone is talking about the offence," said Steven Stamkos, "but usually when you're playing a big game like this you try to focus on doing the right things defensively first, and we'll see how it plays out."

"When you play a team that's this good, you're a bit cautious going into it," added Rielly. "Might be nerves, might be not wanting to make any mistakes, and that can sometimes lead to not quite the outburst people expect. But you never really know. We'll be ready one way or another and we're looking forward to it."

One player who has been especially integral to the Leafs' offensive success so far is John Tavares, who leads the team with 19 goals. Tampa was one of the clubs Tavares met with during his free agency last summer, but passed on the Lightning for the Leafs.

"Were we upset he didn't come here? Of course. But you can't say he didn't make the right decision," said Lightning coach Jon Cooper. "He's having a hell of a season on a great team. So, [I'm] happy for him."

- Good news for the Lightning, bad news for the Leafs: Andrei Vasilevskiy will make his return to the starters' net for Tampa on Thursday after sitting out since Nov. 10 with a foot injury.

"Feels great [he's back]," said Stamkos. "He's been our MVP for a long time here on this team. I know it was tough for him to watch all those games. We [just] can't have that let down now that he's back. ...We can't just think he's back and he has it covered. He does most of the time, but we'll look to continue playing the right way."

In Vasilevskiy's absence, backup Louis Domingue stepped in and produced a 11-3-0 record, which helped keep the Lightning on track while Vasilevskiy got healthy.

A finalist for the Vezina Trophy last season, Vasilevskiy was off to a terrific start before getting hurt, going 9-3-1 with a .927 save percentage. Coming back against the Leafs could help the netminder pick up where he left off - Vasilevskiy is 7-4-1 against the Leafs since 2014-15, with a .917 save percentage and 2.44 goals-against average.

"He's a good goalie, we're going to have to be on the net," said Babcock, "and find some second chances and get traffic there so he doesn't see everything."

If the Lightning work their game plan properly, those chances Toronto generates will be few and far between. Tampa allows 31.2 shots on goal per game, 14th fewest in the NHL, which was an important factor in their success without Vasilevskiy between the pipes.

"Vasy is Vasy, he's going to be a Vezina-quality goalie every year, [but] nothing should really change for us," said Stamkos. "I think we've done a good job of limiting chances and we're going to have to really do that tonight against an offensive team with the firepower that Toronto has."

Maple Leafs projected lines vs. Lightning:

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TSN.CA / Are NHL teams getting better at combating score effects?

Travis Yost

Score effects are an established phenomenon in sports and particularly so within the National Hockey League. Score effects can be behavioural or strategic, but more generally they explain how team performance changes with two factors under consideration: score and time.

Hockey fans know full well the power of score effects. Ever cheer for a team with a lead late in a game? Then it's likely that you have watched as five-man unit after five-man unit from that team play as conservatively as possible. It's a lot of chipping pucks out of the defensive zone, avoiding any sort of transitional gambles that could leave defensive units exposed and playing to the clock. The idea is that time running out becomes more desirable than scoring a goal at some point.

Separately, you have an opponent that is comparatively incentivized to play more aggressively, taking more chances and risks in all areas of the ice. So if it seems like leading teams struggle in the final few minutes to do much of anything (and trailing teams can seemingly do anything they want), well, that's because it's mathematically true.

Consider just the 2018-19 season. We can easily graph out how the shot share changes as teams play with a lead, and further observe how that changes when a team is on home ice or on the road. Generally speaking, conservatism for the leading team and/or heightened aggression for the trailing team begins at the start of the third period and erodes with each minute elapsed.

This is math acting as supporting evidence for what our eyes see – as teams become increasingly incentivized to change the way they play due to time constraints, performance changes. Home teams are a bit more insulated for all of the obvious reasons, but regardless of where a team is playing, they are seeing disparate results with time as they continue to watch the clock.

But the hardcore hockey fan might have noticed something interesting. Home teams results don't appear to change much in the final 15 minutes of the game. Whether there is 10 minutes left on the clock, or five minutes, or two minutes, home teams are generally getting around 43 per cent of the shots as they try to put the game away.

This appears to be a marked change from what we have seen in seasons past. Consider 2010-11 as one example. I have graphed how home teams have owned the shot share over time in the same manner, but this time comparing 2010-11 home teams to 2018-19 home teams. Something has changed:

Whereas the home team sees relatively stable results for the final 15 minutes this season, that wasn't the case years ago. Teams in 2010-11 saw consistently degrading results until the clock hit zero – in the final five minutes of a game, they would consistently sit below 40 per cent.

And here's what is fascinating. This seems to be mostly a home-ice phenomenon. If you look at the same exact graph but for road teams with a lead, the results look identical:

I highlighted the same final five minutes as we saw with home teams and the results are identical. In fact, the results are virtually identical at every interval, save for the choppiness observed from the sampling data. What we have here is an interesting question: What is it that teams are doing on home ice to stave off score effects that they can't seem to duplicate while on the road?

I think that is the right way to phrase the question, but it technically could be asked another way: Why are road teams less effective in 2018 – relative to our prior period – at generating opportunities for themselves when chasing the game?

A fascinating little development I think, though I don't have any obvious conclusion as to why this is occurring just yet.

One thought is that teams have become increasingly aggressive with pulling goaltenders – not only are we seeing teams down one pulling goalies earlier, we're also seeing a higher frequency of teams pulling their goalies when down multiple goals. But goaltender pulls create a non-5-on-5 matchup, and that data wouldn't directly be captured here. Only the threat of a goaltender pull could, theoretically, influence how both teams behave.