



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 14, 2020

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### NHL gearing up to give 2021 season a try during the COVID-19 pandemic

By Chip Alexander

While things can seemingly change weekly if not daily during the pandemic, the NHL does appear to be closing in on plans for a new season.

Media reports have the league eyeing a Jan. 13 start and a 56-game regular season, followed by the 2021 Stanley Cup playoffs. Darren Dreger of TSN in Canada was the first to report on a breakthrough in what has been something of a stalemate in talks between the NHL and NHL Players' Association, and The Associated Press reported Tuesday that training camps could open Jan. 1.

There are still some moving parts, questions and logistics to be handled. Will the team rosters be expanded? Will the games be played in pods or all in home arenas? Will there be some outdoor games?

And all that with the daunting backdrop of COVID-19 and an alarming spike in coronavirus cases in the U.S. and Canada in the past few months. College basketball is grappling with the coronavirus issue, and there have been many cancellations. The NHL still must decide how much testing will be done and how safely games can be played.

What would an abbreviated season be like? Think back to the 2012-13 season and the last lockout, when the NHL and NHLPA haggled for months over a new collective bargaining agreement. A CBA finally was ratified and games began Jan. 19, 2013, in a 48-game regular season. The Stanley Cup finals, won by the Chicago Blackhawks, ended June 24.

Carolina Hurricanes president and general manager Don Waddell turned some heads late last week when he said there could soon be an NHL resolution in plans for the 2020-21 season — or what could now be a 2021 season — and the Canes could be playing games in PNC Arena "sometime in January." Turns out, Waddell wasn't being overly optimistic.

It's likely there will be new divisions. Given the COVID-19 quarantines for those traveling to Canada, there could be an all-Canadian division and three U.S. divisions. Pierre LeBrun of TSN and The Athletic, reported Wednesday that the

Canes could land in a division with Tampa Bay, Florida, Nashville, Columbus, Chicago, Detroit and Minnesota.

Making the playoffs — commissioner Gary Bettman has said he wants to return to a 16-team Stanley Cup format — would be formidable, regardless of where the Hurricanes are placed.

The Canes, in the playoffs the past two seasons, did keep their team largely intact, which would help if there's a hastened start to the season. Defensemen Dougie Hamilton and Brett Pesce have recovered from injuries last season, and coach Rod Brind'Amour would not have to do much tinkering — veteran forward Jesper Fast, signed in free agency, is the only new face in the mix if no further changes are made.

In 2013, the Canes played their first game at Florida on Jan. 19 and started the season 3-4-0. They then went 5-0-1 in their next six games and were in good position in the then-Southeast Division until goalie Cam Ward was lost with a leg injury in early March. Later, defenseman Joni Pitkanen suffered what would be a career-ending heel injury.

The Canes were 19-25-4, missing the playoffs for a fourth consecutive season. While mostly disappointing, the shortened season did make for a few unexpected highlights: forward Jiri Tlustý scored a career-high 23 goals and the Canes started an all-Staal line — Eric, Jordan and youngest brother Jared — in a late-season game.

By year's end, 36 players had appeared in at least one game for the Canes. Of the 36, only Jordan Staal remains from the 2012-13 team.

A strong start and luck with injuries could be a must for the Canes in a sprint-to-the-finish-line kind of season. They'll need to be fast out of the blocks and the Canes have been in Brind'Amour's first two seasons as head coach — 4-0-1 in 2018-19 and then 5-0-0 last season.

The Canes, eliminated by the Bruins in the 2020 Stanley Cup playoffs, have not qualified for the playoffs in three consecutive seasons since the move to North Carolina in 1997.



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## How the World Searched for the Canes in 2020

By Michael Smith

Google released its annual ["Year in Search" summary](#), accompanied by [a video essay](#) that always seems to perfectly encapsulate the mood of a year in a few short, yet impactful minutes.

The driving search term for 2020 was "why," as we all wrestled to find meaning amidst a tumultuous and trying year.

"Bubble" was a popular search term, too, as the sports world came to a sudden halt in March before select leagues returned later in the year with tournaments and postseasons staged in bubbles. The NHL, of course, completed its 2019-20 season with an expanded playoff tournament in two hub cities and administered 33,394 COVID-19 tests with zero positive results over a two-month timeframe.

As 2020's "Year in Search" was encapsulated by "why," the [Carolina Hurricanes' "Year in Search"](#) can be summed up with "Ayes."

The top 10 breakout search queries related to the Canes in 2020 all led back to [that one historic night in Toronto](#):

- ayres hurricanes
- ayres carolina hurricanes
- david ayres
- hurricanes zamboni driver
- carolina emergency goalie
- hurricanes emergency goalie
- emergency goalie carolina
- carolina hurricanes emergency goalie

- carolina hurricanes zamboni
- david ayres

Top related search queries included game-specific matchups - the Boston Bruins, the Canes' First Round opponent, being the top one - tickets, schedule, league information and, of course, the Maple Leafs.

Rising related topics searched - those that saw the biggest increase from the year prior - included "David Ayres," "Ice resurfer," "Morgan Geekie," "James Reimer," "Trade," "Goaltender" and "Dougie Hamilton" in the top 10. The top six related topics searched included "North Carolina," "National Hockey League," "Ice hockey," "Boston Bruins," "Toronto Maple Leafs" and "Goaltender."

Search interest in the Canes peaked the week of Feb. 23-29, as [Ayres mania swept across the globe](#) and a busy trade deadline [brought three new faces to Raleigh](#). Search interest increased again in late July as the league geared up for its 24-team postseason tournament. The week of Aug. 9-15 - after the Qualifying Round sweep of the Rangers and heading into the proper First Round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs - saw the high point of search interest in the Canes in the latter half of the year.

Search interest in the Canes was international, from Thailand to Kazakhstan and South Africa and Vietnam and Australia to the United States and Canada and Finland and Sweden and Russia and the Czech Republic.

Within the United States, the Triangle was, as expected, most plugged into the Canes, followed by Greensboro, Charlotte and New York City. In Canada, the Canes attracted search interest from Toronto, Calgary, Montreal and more.

What will guide Canes-related searches in 2021? Maybe it will be "Stanley Cup."

Search on, Canes fans.

## THE ATHLETIC

### Hurricanes goaltending trade options, realignment's impact: Bag of Jerks

By Sara Civian

Folks, can you believe the #rumblings are starting to turn into #reports and we might have a real start date for the 2020-21 season?

There are finally real questions to be asked and logistics to consider!

As much as I appreciate subscriber Ross P., who asked me which Canes player would be cast as the somewhat shy woodsman who owns a Christmas tree farm in a Hallmark Movie (Sebastian Aho, hello!?) it felt good to see so many questions about tangible, upcoming happenings for this month's Bag of Jerks.

Thank you for sticking around. It's almost time for hockey.



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*Note: Submitted questions have been edited for clarity and length.*

**Which defenseman is most likely to be picked up by Seattle? And slightly related, how would you evaluate Jake Gardiner heading into the season? — Kristofer H.**

Shoutout to Kristofer H. for kicking us off with a softball, here. Y'all have been asking *so much* about the expansion draft so [I finally wrote an actual article about it this week](#). If you're looking for the long answer, there you go. Short answer: Haydn Fleury, Brady Skjei, Jake Bean or Jake Gardiner. Gut answer: Bean. Kraken GM Ron Francis knows him and believed in him enough to draft him 13th overall, and Bean has performed well enough at the AHL level to get an actual shot in the NHL.

Evaluating a high-event defenseman such as Gardiner is super complicated, and his 2019-20 season didn't make it any easier. His four goals, 24 points and minus-24 stat line wasn't ideal last season (the plus/minus was a team-worst). He was expected to contribute more on the power play when in reality the Canes had over 40 percent more expected goals on the man advantage when he wasn't on the ice, according to [Natural Stat Trick](#). I don't necessarily blame him for that when the rest of the second power-play unit also wasn't good, but I think he was signed to be the difference-maker there. I do think he was unlucky considering he had a career-worst shooting percentage (2.99) at five-on-five. The Hurricanes' five-on-five xGF with him on the ice was fine with context, and he had the third-highest Corsi-for percentage among Hurricanes defensemen.

I would evaluate Gardiner as "confusing and unlucky" but he had games where he was totally locked in. I don't think you can blame him for many of the subpar stats, but you'd like to see some stability next season.

**Hey Sara, big fan of your stuff from Twitter so started following you on here. My question is: Who do the Hurricanes consider to be their rivals? I think we discussed on Twitter awhile back (I'm a Caps fan). I can certainly see the rivalry building between the two but it's hard for me to see it until Canes sustain their current level of success another year or two (I do fully expect that to happen), and would love another playoff series between the two teams. Thanks! — John Z.**

Thanks, John! And thank you for the reasonable, mild-tempered display of this opinion, lol. I will point you to an article from (Oh, I don't know, when was the first game of the last NHL season? 15 years ago? Something like that.) last season [when I asked noted series villain Warren Foegele the same question](#).

"It's always competitive playing against these guys, and they're the best team in the league right now," Foegele said. "We don't like them, they don't like us, it's that simple."

But is it a rivalry yet?

"Maybe, maybe a little bit," he said. "It always gets a little chippy during the games, too. We're focused on what we need to do, but it's always fun beating them ... this is two teams battling hard who both don't like each other."

Two teams that don't like each other battling hard in the same division? Sounds like a budding rivalry to me — but the keyword is budding. I agree this needs to fester a few more years, but you have to start somewhere. It'll be interesting to see if it fizzles if the Canes and Caps are in different divisions this upcoming season. I hope it doesn't — it's so fun to cover these games and I love how angry both fanbases get on Twitter. I'm from Boston so I'm someone who grew up hating the Yankees more than I liked the Red Sox. "Rivalries" to me are deep-seated in tradition, but this one has all the potential.

**Who would you look at as in-season trade options for goaltending? Feel like Canes can't make the next jump without a bonafide #1. Fleury was an interesting option before but both teams have similar cap issues with that \$7 million AAV. — Victor P.**

It's a valid concern, and I feel like the Canes should start fully trusting Petr Mrazek since he's the goaltender they decided to ride with, but they also can't be afraid to pull the trade trigger at a certain point. The Marc-Andre Fleury situation is interesting with Vegas clearly wanting to keep him, but you have to wonder if that changes once it's determined that Robin Lehner is completely healthy. Even if Fleury is a possibility, [I have been basically banging on a table screaming "Darcy Kuemper" since September](#). It makes too much sense in terms of finances, and Kuemper is severely underrated in my opinion.

**Sara, did you see the article on Pittsburgh trading for Dougie (Hamilton) if the season goes south? Sounds like someone had too many Iron Citys. —Brandon W.**

I didn't see this, but I will offer the reminder that a lot of the time behind the scenes, NHL front offices will kick the tires on any good idea — how do you think Don Waddell traded Victor Rask for Nino Niederreiter? With both Andrei Svechnikov and Hamilton negotiations looming, I urge everyone to pay close attention to the phrasing in these articles. Any NHL GM with a struggling blue line who *doesn't* ask the Canes about Hamilton should probably be fired. The Canes should also be open to listening because A) You want to keep good relationships with trade partners in tact. B) It might open the door to a different, more minor trade, etc. C) Connor McDavid for Hamilton, who says no?

This is why Waddell always says he's "answering the phone" and "listening" when these things come up. It doesn't mean Hamilton is going anywhere.

Also, Yuengling > IC.

**Which one of the Hurricanes' prospects do you look forward to seeing the most at WJC? — Jérémie F.**



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Well, now that Ryan Suzuki just made [Team Canada](#), I'm super intrigued to see what he'll do. [Scott Wheeler recently wrote an incredible article on what he's had to overcome because of an eye injury](#), and that kind of drive is truly inspirational to me.

**Which player are you most looking forward to interviewing in person again? (Obviously assuming in a time when it is safe to do so.) — Aoife B.**

Justin Will — ugh.

I'm dying to know if James Reimer became a pilot yet.

**Do you see the AHL happening this year? Or will the Canes use a taxi squad? If no AHL, how would various call-ups and player development work for guys outside the main roster? — Andrew R.**

This is something I have been poking around at quite a bit, actually. There are several guys I know who are first- and second-line AHL players/hovering around legit NHL prospects who decided to play in the ECHL this season because of the certainty. One source says his ECHL team is paying 70 percent of his AHL salary. There has already been a huge trickle-down effect with all the minor leagues.

As for the Hurricanes, it's gotta be tough transitioning AHL (from Charlotte to Chicago) teams on top of all of this, but at least they aren't in a predicament several teams are in where their AHL affiliate is across the border. Last I heard, the AHL is still planning to play. Per our Corey Pronman:

I think the NHL needs to hammer out details like roster size before AHL details are finalized, but regardless this season will make development more difficult.

**Sara, if you could write for any team in the league other than Carolina, which would you choose and why? — James B.**

Vancouver because I love the city and another woman in Vancouver sports media wouldn't hurt.

**Thoughts on (temporary?) realignment for this season. Is the Hurricanes' best and most realistic spot with the other teams on I-95, or could they be placed in a different division so a team like Pittsburgh gets to stay with its more traditional rivals? — Derek O.**

I think the current (subject to change) iteration of Carolina, Columbus, Detroit, Chicago, Florida, Minnesota, Nashville and Tampa Bay gives the Hurricanes their best chance to win. Heck, Tampa might go undefeated. The question under this (Shoutout Becky M.) asked who poses the biggest threat to the Canes in this division, and Tampa is the obvious choice but maybe just the lack of familiarity and rhythm in general (that goes for every team, though).

**Thoughts on Jack LaFontaine and his great start to the season? Do you see a future for him with the Canes? — Shannon A.**

I am absolutely loving what I'm seeing out of this kid and his energy, as much as it pains me that I have to say this about a Minnesota team.

The Gophers are 8-0-0 and the goalie who has already had a journey in his career finally seems comfortable. I also think it's hilariously awesome he got his first career point (an assist) over his former team Michigan, a team I dislike slightly more than Minnesota. LaFontaine is on a 10-game win streak spanning to last season. He has had two shutouts in eight games and he's allowed two or fewer goals in each of his past 13 starts. He's on a tear and I'll admit it's making me change my mind about him.

*But* — and there's always a but when it comes to college hockey goalies — we need to bring up some context. Minnesota's defense is the best in college hockey right now and this is largely thanks to LaFontaine. But it is also an all-around great team with a top-four offense and the most power-play goals in the nation. And as much as I hate to say it, my beloved Nittany Lions have been an absolute dumpster fire until they finally won their first game last week (except for Hurricanes prospect Kevin Wall, funny enough).

I am being extra hard on LaFontaine because 1) I am hard on college hockey goalies by default, 2) I know how CanesLand likes to get its hopes up about goalie prospects, 3) I think I could've stopped some of the shots Penn State was taking in those games and 4) I need to learn more about why he switched teams so much. So I will be sure to catch up with him soon and figure out all that.

But what he's doing is impressive and fun, and it's forcing me to consider that there might be a future for him with the Canes. I'm just not ready to declare him a replacement for Mrazek.

## Seattle Kraken expansion mock draft 5.0: Who could the Hurricanes lose?

By Sara Civian

The Hurricanes front office has worked up to respectability by spending money on free agents who actually move the needle and taking on bigger contracts via trade to actually improve the team. What a concept. Now, they are entering the 2020-21 season with about \$1 million in cap space and

Andrei Svechnikov, Dougie Hamilton and goaltending contracts looming.

The Canes have no doubt built up this depth — particularly on defense — with the Seattle expansion draft in mind. The downside of that is obviously that they are more likely to lose



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a quality player than when they lost Connor Brickley in the Vegas expansion draft, but I guess it's better to have loved and lost to have never loved at all. Best case scenario could be Seattle taking a larger contract off the Hurricanes' hands to free some cap space, even if the talent goes with it.

We'll also need to remember the Hurricanes are at a unique disadvantage with former GM Ron Francis being able to pick from a team with some enticing players he drafted himself. If we're being honest with ourselves, common sense would cause one to consider that this is part of the reason why Martin Necas didn't get much of a chance to prove himself at the NHL level until last season. Francis was always (rightfully) extremely high on him. Now, per the expansion draft rule that **first- and second-year NHL players are exempt**, Necas is safe.

But who isn't safe, and what might Francis and the Kraken do about that?

A refresher on the basic rules:

- Teams have the option of protecting seven forwards, three defensemen and one goalie, or eight skaters and one goalie.
- Any player with a no-movement clause has to be protected.
- First- and second-year pros along with unsigned draft picks are exempt from the process.
- Teams must make at least one defenseman and two forwards available who played 40 games the previous season (or 70 combined in the previous two).
- One goalie must be made available.

## Goaltenders

It's tough to project what might happen here when the Hurricanes have no goalies signed after 2020-21, but we do know they will need to make at least one goalie available and can only protect one. We also know that at some point there will have to be something inside the net resembling a starting goalie, so let's say they re-sign Petr Mrazek and/or sign the goalie of your dreams — that person will be protected. Alex Nedeljkovic will be an RFA, so let's say the Hurricanes reach an agreement with him. They'll have to expose him and whoever they sign as a backup goalie (assuming they do so) and just hope for the best. This upcoming season is important for Nedeljkovic's future with the Canes for that reason — perhaps he could make an impression on Francis (the man who drafted him) with an outstanding showing and earn a fresh start in Seattle, or there's a slim-but-existent chance the Kraken draft Carolina's mystery backup and Nedeljkovic slides into that role.

Regardless, the amount of uncertainty at this position in Carolina, paired with the team's strength at other positions and what other teams have to offer in net ([Jake Allen](#), [anybody](#)?) makes me believe it's unlikely Seattle will pick a Hurricanes goaltender.

*(Author's note: We got through this without even one David Ayres joke. Please clap.)*

## Forwards

First off, who do the Hurricanes have signed through the 2021-22 season?

Sebastian Aho, Jordan Staal, Teuvo Teravainen, Nino Niederreiter, Vincent Trocheck, Jesper Fast and Martin Necas.

Who will most likely get re-signed?

If owner Tom Dundon telling me and other local media dozens of times that he wants Andrei Svechnikov in a Hurricanes uniform for life isn't enough, maybe the comically large, multi-story pillar at new practice facility Wake Competition Center will do the trick.

I'd also put Jordan Martinook and Warren Foegele in a similar, albeit pillar-less category.

So, let's assume the Hurricanes take the traditional 7-3-1 approach.

Jordan Staal gets immunity with his no-move clause, then I'd protect Svechnikov, Aho, Teravainen, Trocheck, Fast and a Foegele type player.

I mentioned money off the hop because some of these decisions at forward are such close calls that they end up coming down to contract flexibility. Niederreiter didn't have an awful season, but [his 2020-21 regression](#) and his \$5.25 million AAV are basically an expansion draft cocktail.

Those last two forward spots are the most up-for-debate of all the Hurricanes' potential protected players, and it'll come down to whatever happens this upcoming season. But the strategy of exposing a player with a more expensive contract can be a sort-of win-win: The Canes free up \$5.25 million for 2021-22 (to help sign Svechnikov and Hamilton and mystery goalies of the world), or the Kraken don't touch Niederreiter and the Canes keep a good player.

["Foegele type player"](#) is a cop out, but it was intended to get the real point across — the Hurricanes will be making money moves, and they'll be keeping those moves in mind long before they re-sign certain players. A "Foegele type" could be any third-liner who either has a great 2020-21 or is willing to sign for cheapest, ya know?

There's also what you've likely been waiting for: The Kraken will probably pick from the Hurricanes' 5,000 options on defense, some of which their GM chose in the draft and has a relationship with.

That's why I think the Hurricanes will have an easier time exposing someone like Martinook or rising center Morgan Geekie.

## Defense

A few weeks ago I toured the Hurricanes' amazing aforementioned practice facility, Wake Competition Center. I'm not pumping anyone's tires, by the way — I've been to roughly 85 percent of all the NHL practice facilities at this point and it's easily top five.

Anyway, I was told a story I will relay to you as discreetly and to the point as I possibly can.

1. The hot tub room (Yeah, this ain't Raleigh Center Ice) did not originally have TVs in it.
2. A certain defenseman toured the facility, and mentioned something along the lines of how this would be a perfect



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place for a TV. \*To be clear\*, he said this in passing/as a joke/please do not interpret this as him being rude because that was not the tone of the interaction at all.

3. A certain owner told a certain architect to put TVs in the hot tub room.

4. There are some pretty nice TVs in the hot tub room.

It would be sort of hilarious if this ends up being Dougie Hamilton's legacy in Raleigh, but for some odd reason it made me more confident than ever that the Hurricanes are going to get an extension done.

We will jot Hamilton and the hot tub TV room down as signed and protected.

Do we really need to go over Jacob Slavin? Easiest protected player decision on the roster.

The Canes have been (rightfully, IMO) unwilling to move Brett Pesce for a top-six forward ever since Leafs Nation tried to force this into being a thing. They aren't about to give him up for nothing.

So, will the Kraken pick Haydn Fleury, Brady Skjei, Jake Bean or Jake Gardiner out of the Hurricanes defensemen?

Unsatisfying answer: We'll need to know more about their strategy.

If Francis wants some affordable revenge he'll snag a now-flourishing Fleury. If he wants to show 13th overall pick Bean that he still believes he can be a top-four NHL defenseman one day — which Bean sure can — he can do that. If the Kraken want to go for familiarity and general above averageness instead, Skjei and Gardiner are there.

My gut says Bean because he still has the potential Francis once saw in him, and it would be as chip-on-the-shouldery as Vegas once was.

## Chaos mode

What if the Hurricanes let Dougie Hamilton become a free agent until, like, the day after the expansion draft so they don't have to expose him? I think that would be hilarious but risky. I also sort of feel like Hamilton would encourage this sort of thing in theory. But in reality, this is his life and the biggest opportunity to make money that he has. But it would be hilarious, and consider this: hot tub TVs. I don't think this will happen but I pray to all of our gods that it does.

Or, what if Jordan Staal waives his no-move clause to be the Seattle veteran? Eh. I doubt this will happen. Just let the man finally have his day as a league-best third-line center with Trocheck now providing 2C duties.



## Carolina Hurricanes host toy drive; GM says NHL could return Jan. 13

By Bridget Condon

It's been 10 months since fans saw live action inside PNC arena - but the Carolina Hurricanes are making sure the community continues to feel their support.

RALEIGH, N.C. (WTVD) -- It's been 10 months since fans saw live action inside PNC arena but the Carolina Hurricanes are making sure the community continues to feel the team's support.

From now through Dec. 17, the Canes are [hosting a toy drive at the team store](#) to benefit the Durham Children's Initiative.

"We felt it was very important to provide an opportunity...to these kids that otherwise might not have any Christmas presents under the tree," said General Manager of the Carolina Hurricanes, Don Waddell. "This is another avenue that our fans can connect with the organization. We're not successful without the community support; we recognize that. We definitely want to be a part of this community."

Waddell said this is the first December since going pro in 1980 that he wasn't involved in hockey in one way or another.

"It is different," he said. "The good thing is things look like they're getting into a better direction as far as potential start dates."

There's still no official word from the NHL on when and how the 2021 season will start but the league has been working with the players association and Waddell says January 13 is the new target date for the season to start, which could include a realignment of the divisions.

"The part with the union has been satisfied from what I understand," he added. "Now, we've got to deal with what we've been dealing with the last 8 months and that's COVID. There's certain cities and places that can't host games at all so those are things the league has got to work through with the NHLPA."



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Waddell said if the league decides that each team will play in their home city he feels confident that the Hurricanes will be able to host games at PNC Arena - starting without fans.

"We don't want to put anybody at risk whether it's a player, coach, employee of the organization or a fan or anybody," said Waddell. "That's not the purpose of this. Hockey is secondary to somebody's health. Saying that we do feel like we proved last year when we started up, even when we were here in Raleigh and then continued into the bubble in Toronto, that if you have the right protocols set up that you can do these things and do them safely. We spent a lot of time and a lot of money preparing for whenever this potential day could happen."

Waddell also added that when the time comes to play he believes coach Rod Brind'Amour and the team will be ready to go.

"We've been working on this for a while now because we knew, we felt we were going to be playing at some point. No doubt our coaches are ready to roll now. When we open training camp, whatever date that is I know Rod and his team will be fully prepared. I know our players will be. The other good thing is a lot of our players are back in town now with our new facility out in Morrisville being able to train with Bill Burniston our strength and conditioning coach. I think conditioning won't be a factor. One thing is every team is dealing with the same thing, there's no advantages or disadvantages. The advantage I know we have is our coaching staff definitely will be well prepared."



## Gold: Meeting the Hurricanes new neighbors

By Adam Gold

While there are still several details to iron out, the National Hockey League is nearing an official announcement on the framework of a 2021 season. Either 52 or 56 games, a start date of January 13 and four, realigned divisions highlight the package for the upcoming season. Still to be settled are some economic fine print, what to do with all of the players in the American Hockey League since without fans they won't play (can you say Taxi Squad?), and whether or not the schedule will include 2 or 3 open weeks and what -- if any -- fan involvement might be permitted.

What we do know, unequivocally, is that the seven teams based in Canada will have to comprise their own division as team Covid-19 has all but shut down the US-Canadian border without long periods of quarantine. "You can't go back and forth, so we're actually going to have to realign", league commissioner Gary Bettman told NHL.com's Tom Gulliti. "We're probably going to have to have a Canadian division and realign in the U.S."

Elliott Friedman, NHL insider from Sportsnet.ca and Hockey Night in Canada has a few [more details](#) AND floats the idea that the league might sell advertising on player helmets. In a year where any and all revenue streams should be explored -- remember that attendance will be miniscule for at least the first two months and likely a lot longer -- it's time to look under the couch cushions for all the loose change you can find.

While there are still "i"'s to dot and "t"'s to cross, the Carolina Hurricanes will apparently be playing a portion of their games in the central time zone. As it stands now, Carolina will join defending champion Tampa Bay, Florida, Columbus, Detroit, Nashville, Chicago and Minnesota in a reconfigured "Central" division. The three New York area clubs will group with the Bruins, Sabres, Capitals, Penguins and Flyers in the "East". While the Blues, Stars and Avalanche, normally in the central

will team up with Vegas, Arizona, Los Angeles, Anaheim and San Jose in the "West".

There is some discussion about swapping St. Louis and Minnesota, which would be nice since it would enable the Canes to see former teammate Justin Faulk eight times (theoretically) during the regular season, but this is how the league is leaning with regards to realigned divisions.

So, while we have a little time, here's how Carolina did against each of the seven clubs with which they stand to become quite intimate over a five month stretch starting in the middle of January.

(2020 records)

**Tampa Bay Lightning (43-21-6, 92 points in 70 games).**

2020 Finish: Stanley Cup Champions (defeated Dallas Stars 4-2)

Head Coach: Jon Cooper, 9th year, 348-180-50.

Key additions: ***The Stanley Cup***

Key Subtractions: Kevin Shattenkirk (D), Tyler Johnson (F).

Season series: Canes 2-1-0. Carolina took the opening game of the series in overtime before splitting the final two games.

Notes: The Lightning may have to deal with a few more subtractions as they're still a little more than \$2 million over the league's salary cap and that doesn't include still-to-be-agreed-upon contracts with Anthony Cirelli and Erik Cernak. The loss of Johnson will not cause the Hurricanes to lose any sleep as the feisty, crafty centerman piled up more career points (14 goals, 8 assists) against the Hurricanes than any other NHL squad. And, if you boil it down further, Johnson's last 15 games against Carolina saw him score 13 goals, with a pair of hat tricks to his credit.



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## **Columbus Blue Jackets (33-22-15, 81 points in 70 games).**

2020 Finish: Lost to Tampa Bay, 4-1, in Eastern Conference Quarterfinals.

Head Coach: John Tortorella, 6th year, 209-140-42. 655 career victories and one Stanley Cup.

Key Additions: Max Domi (F) and Mikko Koivu (F).

Key Subtractions: Josh Anderson (F).

Season Series: Columbus swept season series 3-0-0.

Notes: Cam Atkinson had a pair of goals and an assist to lead Columbus in scoring against the Canes. Atkinson was the only player for the Jackets to score multiple goals as nine different players found the back of the net last season. Columbus is the only fellow Metropolitan Division team to drift into the central division for this year.

## **Florida Panthers (35-26-8, 78 points in 69 games).**

2020 Finish: Lost to the Islanders, 3-1, in the Qualifying Round.

Head Coach: Joel Quenneville, 2nd year, 35-26-8. 925 career wins and three Stanley Cups.

Key Additions: Alex Wennberg (F), Radko Gudas (D), Vinnie Hinostroza (F) and Carter Verhaeghe (F).

Key Subtractions: Brian Boyle (F) and Mike Hoffman (F).

Season Series: Carolina 2-1-0.

Notes: The Panthers were kind of a mess the first time the Canes saw them. Carolina pumped in four goals in the 1st period and then added another early in the 2nd en route to a 6-3 win. But, Florida hit their stride late in the winter, making a run at a post season spot until the pause shut it all down. That they didn't regain that level of play after the restart shouldn't stop them from continuing to progress under one of the best coaches in the sport. Also, because it's always nice to see old friends, it will be interesting to see if Chase Priskie, Eetu Luostarinen and Alexei Saarela can contribute to the Florida line up.

## **Nashville Predators (35-26-8, 78 points in 69 games).**

2020 Finish: Lost to Arizona, 3-1, in Qualifying Round.

Head Coach: John Hynes, 2nd season, 16-11-1.

Key Additions: Brad Richardson (F) and Mark Borowiecki (D).

Key Subtractions: Markus Granlund (F) and Craig Smith (F).

Season Series: The Canes and Preds split the two games a year ago each winning on the other team's ice.

Notes: Recent history against Nashville has been kind to the Hurricanes as Carolina has compiled a 5-1-2 mark in the series over the last four seasons. Former Hurricanes coach Peter Laviolette was fired in the middle of last season, which gives him something in common with current Preds boss John Hynes. He too was fired last season as the New Jersey Devils gave him the boot after a rough 20 game start.

## **Minnesota Wild (35-27-7, 77 points in 69 games).**

2020 Finish: Lost to Vancouver, 3-1, in the Qualifying Round.

Head Coach: Dean Evason, 2nd year, 8-4-0.

Key Additions: Nick Bjugstad (F), Marcus Johansson (F) and Cam Talbot (G).

Key Subtractions: Devan Dubnyk (G), Eric Staal (F), Mikko Koivu (F).

Season Series: Carolina went 2-0-0.

Notes: It would have been great to see Eric Staal eight times in four months were it not for the trade that sent the former Canes star to the Sabres for Johansson. It's possible that the Wild could be swapped out for the Blues, which would mean that the last two cup champs could be in Carolina's temporary home.

## **Chicago Blackhawks (32-30-8, 72 points in 70 games).**

2020 Finish: Lost to Vegas, 4-1, in Western Conference Quarterfinals.

Head Coach: Jeremy Colliton, 3rd season, 62-58-17.

Key Additions: Mattias Janmark (F) and Lucas Wallmark (F).

Key Subtractions: Corey Crawford (G).

Season Series: Carolina outscored Chicago 8-2 to sweep the season series 2-0-0.

Notes: The Hurricanes have gotten the better of the Blackhawks the last few years going 5-1-1 in their last 7 meetings. Not sure how much longer the following can last but Patrick Kane has scored just 2 goals in 16 career games against Carolina -- the fewest the future Hall of Famer has registered against any team in the NHL.

## **Detroit Red Wings (17-49-5, 39 points in 71 games).**

2020 Finish: (See above) Eliminated from playoff contention before Boxing Day.

Head Coach: Jeff Blashill, 6th year, 153-194-52.

Key Additions: Mark Staal (D), Vladislav Namestnikov (F), Troy Stecher (D), Sam Gagner (F), Thomas Greiss (G).

Season Series: Canes swept the 3-game series, outscoring Detroit, 14-5.

Notes: After the Red Wings made the playoffs for a staggering 26 straight years -- winning four Stanley Cups and playing for two others in the process -- Detroit has now gone four straight without postseason play. But, while point totals in the 70s are far below the high standards to which fans of the Winged Wheel have grown accustomed, that's nothing when compared to last year's apocalyptic 39 points. Woof.

Before we wrap this up, aside from what appears on the surface to be a softer division than the East, there is further good news for the Hurricanes. Not only did Sebastian Aho (13 goals, 22 points), Andrei Svechnikov (9 goals, 18 points), Dougie Hamilton (5 goals, 16 points) and Jaccob Slavin (2 goals, 15 points) all excel last year against the seven clubs who are in line to comprise the Canes division. But, one of the keys to Carolina's 2021 season, Nino Niederreiter, scored more than half of his 11 goals last year against these teams. In fact, Nino's combined for 30 goals and 67 points in 119 career games against the Central's magnificent seven, hopefully signalling a return to the El Nino who helped key a



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second half surge in 2019 after arriving from the Wild in the trade for Victor Rask. And yes, Victor is still doing his thing for Minnesota. So, for what that's worth, it's another opportunity to see old friends.

And, judging from what we've been dealt in 2020, seeing old friends will be a departure from our new normal -- as is everything about the 2021 season.

## SportScan

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

Sportsnet.ca / Five potential moves to watch for before next NHL season

Ryan Dixon

December 12, 2020, 8:55 AM

If the two best words in hockey are "game seven," the most exciting words to see paired when it comes to off-ice activity are "pressure point."

Whether it's the trade deadline, the NHL draft, or the days that directly bookend the start of free agency, there are specific times throughout the hockey calendar that spur movement. The start of a new season represents another period when things come to a head, as teams are finally forced to deal with issues they've been able to duck through the dog days of the off-season, including salary cap crunches, stalled contract negotiations and — once in a while — a good ol' fashioned disgruntled player.

The last time we had September-based training camps, the defending-champion St. Louis Blues acquired Justin Faulk from the Carolina Hurricanes and signed him to a \$45-million extension he wasn't going to get from the Canes. One year prior to that, enormous subplots in Montreal and Ottawa were at long last resolved when the Canadiens dealt Max Pacioretty to Vegas (more on Max later) and the Sens sent Erik Karlsson to the Sharks in moves that occurred with less than a month to go before puck-drop on a new campaign.

As we inch closer to an abbreviated season everyone hopes is coming, there are lingering situations around the league that could — and, in some cases, must — be resolved before the first game of the 2021 campaign. The most intriguing ones are listed below.

Remaining Time -2:00

Why Blues luck out in NHL's proposal to realign divisions

Tampa Bay's Cap Crunch

The Bolts have signed one of two key RFAs this off-season — Mikhail Sergachev put pen to paper on Nov. 25, while Anthony Cirelli has yet to agree on terms — and we're now in the "No, really" stage of questioning how the defending champs will get under the cap. Not long after they won the Cup, speculation flared up that Tampa would at least explore the option of clearing \$8.5 million by dealing Steven Stamkos. The captain, of course, has a no-move clause and by the time you eliminate the teams he'd have no interest in playing for and those that simply can't fit him under their own cap, the list of legit suitors evaporates fast.

Alex Killorn — who can only veto trades to 16 teams — has long heard his name come up in the context of being a cap causality. He's a great player who makes \$4.5 million against the cap for the next three years. Tampa could surely find a dance partner there, but that likely won't loosen the belt enough once Cirelli signs.

Vegas's Cap Crunch

Somehow the Golden Knights are circled as a team that both needs to shed money, yet also could be in on the aforementioned Stamkos if he becomes available. Say this about Vegas's swashbuckling hockey club; it sure adopted the no-inhibitions mentality of its city.

The Alex Pietrangolo in, Nate Schmidt out equation still leaves Vegas in a position where it needs to make a move. Names like Pacioretty, Marc-Andre Fleury and Jonathan Marchessault have cycled through the rumour mill. General manager Kelly McCrimmon said in October that Fleury wouldn't be traded, and in fact the Knights could be relying heavily on the original franchise face since batterymate Robin Lehner had off-season shoulder surgery. Owner Bill Foley recently said Pacioretty isn't going anywhere, so perhaps there's fireless smoke there.

Regardless, there are titillating forces at play because Vegas is all-in, has to do something, and has a well-established willingness to make upper-case moves.

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Patrik Laine

If Vegas is a fast-twitch muscle when it comes to monster transactions, Winnipeg moves at the speed of a finger nail. Famously patient GM Kevin Cheveldayoff won't be rushed into anything and there's plenty of reason to fret about trading Laine at all. Still, this situation hasn't seemed completely healthy in a long time and this off-season saw what feels like the most serious version of talks around the fact Laine won't be happy unless he's guaranteed a spot on Winnipeg's top line.

We've mentioned the role pressure points play in making deals happen. Well, Laine is now essentially seven months away from becoming an RFA for the second time in three summers. He's also creeping closer and closer to being able to leave for nothing as a UFA, which is basically why Winnipeg finally parted ways with Jacob Trouba — another guy who never felt long for Manitoba — ahead of the 2019 NHL Draft.

Laine would be an attractive player to all sorts of teams, so if one of them will cough up, maybe this finally happens.

New York Islanders' Cap Crunch

When much of the fall and early winter is spent wondering if there will be a season at all, it's easy to lose sight of the fact one of the best young stars in the game — Mathew Barzal — is still without a contract. Getting Barzal inked looked like it was going to require some serious inge-Lou-ity (2020 has robbed of us of so much; we get to keep dorky puns) from GM Lou Lamoriello, but the math changed when Johnny Boychuk retired due to an eye injury. The blue-liner's \$6-million hit can now move onto long-term injury reserve, thus creating some breathing room for a New York club that already bit down and shipped out up-and-coming defenceman



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Devon Toews to the Colorado Avalanche because it didn't have the room to offer him a new deal.

We know at last year's trade deadline the Islanders and Minnesota Wild went way down the path toward a deal that would have seen Zach Parise move east and send Andrew Ladd to the State of Hockey. Ladd has three years remaining on a hit of \$5.5 million against the cap, so while the Islanders would need to inject a serious sweetener, a rebuilding team devoid of cap concerns might be amenable to acquiring a solid citizen who's won a Cup and served as captain of an NHL club.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson

In theory, the book was closed on this when the Arizona Coyotes failed to meet OEL's demands of being moved before the start of free agency to either the Vancouver Canucks or Boston Bruins. The Canucks subsequently acquired Schmidt from Vegas, so we'll assume they won't soon be adding another defenceman — particularly one with an AAV of \$8.25 million.

Boston, however, could still be lurking in the weeds. The B's certainly don't have a ton of cap space, but if they make the pieces line up, it's conceivable they could still add the 29-year-old Ekman-Larsson to a club that's about to get its final kicks at the can.

And, of course, if the career Coyote agrees to expand the list of teams he'd consider, new 'Zona GM Bill Armstrong could certainly make something work.

The Athletic / Final thoughts on Team Canada's 2021 world junior selection camp

By Scott Wheeler Dec 11, 2020

Team Canada's selection camp for the 2021 world juniors didn't travel in a straight line to its end point, but it has arrived there nonetheless.

Seven games were cancelled (a third and final Red-White game, and six more against a team of U Sports all-stars). A 14-day quarantine took place at the team hotel in Red Deer, Alta. Five players were sent home early, deemed "unfit to play" under the return to play protocols after a series of positive COVID-19 tests prior to camp and in camp. Then, after a few short days of practice and a pair of intrasquad games once the camp was allowed to resume, the 41 remaining players in camp needed to become 25 so that the final roster could enter the Edmonton bubble on December 13 for another five-day quarantine period, and more tests.

Up next: In advance of this year's tournament start on Christmas Day (not Boxing Day), Team Canada will play a pair of pre-tournament games in the Edmonton on December 21 (against Sweden) and December 23 (against Russia).

Before the camp started, I made my picks for Team Canada's roster (and the other four hockey superpowers). Now that it's over, here are my thoughts, notes, and quotes on the truncated camps' standouts, the cuts, the roster, and everything in between.

The cuts

December 7: The following five players were cut before Team Canada's camp resumed due to return to play protocols, requiring players not have tested positive for COVID-19 a full 17 days before entering the bubble on December 13.

LHD Matthew Robertson (New York Rangers)

Robertson was probably the player in this group with the best odds at making the team, though more likely as one of the two extra defencemen. He has played for Team Canada a trio of times, he's 19 years old, he could have killed penalties, at 6-foot-4 and more than 210 pounds he was one of the biggest players in camp, despite his size his skating is actually a strength of his game, etc. There were things about what he offered that were going to keep him in the mix, even if he was a bubble guy. For what it's worth, though: I didn't think he was particularly impressive in the two Red-White games he did play in. He wasn't among those who struggled, per se, but he certainly wasn't a standout either.

LHD Mason Millman (Philadelphia Flyers)

Millman was always a long shot to make the team, one of a handful of players I didn't expect to be invited in all honesty. In both of Canada's first two Red-White games before the quarantine, I thought he looked overwhelmed and panicked throughout, a step behind the play and caught out of position on several sequences. His execution was sloppy, like he was slapping the puck around at an elevated pace. I'm sure that doesn't take away the sting of having the process taken out of his hands due to the pandemic, though, especially because he's a 19-year-old and there won't be another crack at it.

LHD Daemon Hunt (Minnesota Wild)

Hunt was one of the more physical players through the camp's first two games, regularly stepping up through the neutral zone to play the body and establish his presence. For a kid who didn't get to showcase himself during the 2019-2020 season like his peers did due to injury, it was nice to see him play with that kind of confidence. He's never going to be a power-play guy on these types of teams, so his game defensively has to be sturdy. That's not really what he's known for but he certainly didn't play like he was intimidated. He's eligible to return for the 2022 team and he'll have a shot at playing a second or third-pairing role next year. I liked what I saw from him pre-camp with the MJHL's Virden Oil Capitals, too. This season will be pivotal for him if he is to re-establish himself in the top prospect conversation many believed he was in before a skate blade cut his arm and forced him to miss half a season.

C Ridly Greig (Ottawa Senators)

Greig never got an opportunity to showcase himself at Team Canada's camp. He arrived late to Red Deer due to a positive COVID-19 test before the camp started, and the prevailing symptoms that came with it. Though it sounds like he did test negative before and after his arrival at camp, he was still ruled out due to the timeline of his recovery. He's eligible for next year's team and fits the mould as a bottom-six energy guy who can chip in offensively without needing power-play time on a stacked team.

C/LW Xavier Simoneau

Simoneau, like Greig, was late to camp while he awaited a negative COVID-19 test, and never got into one of the two pre-quarantine games as a result. Simoneau, who has twice been passed up in the NHL Draft and hasn't typically been a Hockey Canada participant, was off to an outstanding start in Drummondville, where he's the Voltigeurs' captain and one of the QMJHL's best players. With an excellent camp, it wasn't hard to imagine him earning a spot as an extra with leadership qualities and the versatility to fill in up and down the lineup if injuries struck. It would've been a great opportunity for him to potentially showcase himself to NHL clubs once more, too.

December 10: The following seven players were released in Team Canada's first round of performance-related cuts.

C/RW Tyson Foerster (Philadelphia Flyers)

Foerster's cut shouldn't come as much of a surprise based on pedigree and age (fear not Flyers fans, he's eligible to play in the 2022 tournament), and it didn't come as much of a surprise after his play in camp. That's not an indictment, either. But he was one of the only prospects that didn't show up in my game notes and he was never among the players that Andre Tourigny mentioned through his media



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avails. He just wasn't noticeable in a camp that was more loaded with talent than it typically is. I suspect he plays a middle-six scoring role on next year's team.

LW Adam Beckman (Minnesota Wild)

Beckman just never really got into a groove or looked like the player that he was in the WHL last season. I thought he was effective in spurts when he played to the middle lane, with a number of nice little plays to the interior or the front of the net. But he was otherwise unremarkable. Among Thursday's seven cuts, Beckman was one of just two players (along with the next name on this list) who won't get another crack at playing in the world juniors. I feel for him. He has worked so hard to get here.

C/RW Cole Schwindt (Florida Panthers)

Schwindt was probably the lone player I was pleasantly surprised got an invite to Canada's camp. He's a legitimate prospect but his path to this team — and to the NHL, frankly — was going to rely upon his ability to fill a role as an energy guy who could be relied upon further down the lineup in a depth penalty-killing role. Even to fill that role, he was going to have to outperform some other more talented players, and do it while playing with lesser camp linemates. That just didn't happen, unfortunately. The camp should serve as a nice stepping stone back to Mississauga for a big year in a shortened OHL season, though.

C Hendrix Lapierre (Washington Capitals)

After a stellar return to action in the QMJHL, at the end of a long year and a half, I'd pegged Lapierre as a candidate for one of the team's extra forward spots because of his ability to potentially help out up and down the lineup. He's a player Team Canada has typically liked. He's a guy who has performed well internationally, he could've played on the second power-play unit if need be, his pace and detail could have lent itself to second penalty-kill usage, and he's the type who's always moving and works with a variety of linemates. But the truth is that he got outplayed by the others who were in that same tier as he was. When it came time for cuts, he would've been among mine as well. I thought he looked consistently good in the first of the three scrimmages he participated in but he stickhandled himself into trouble and looked like he was forcing the issue in the second. When I saw that he wasn't among those at the top of the scoresheet in the third, the cut felt inevitable.

C Shane Wright (2022 NHL Draft)

In the first two Red-White games, Wright looked like he was trying too hard to simplify, to make the easy play. There was a lot of chip-and-chase, a lot of deference to his linemates, that kind of thing. And he can effectively play that game with his frame and his speed, but it's not what distinguishes him. His play in three scrimmages when he's more than a full year younger than the best young hockey players around him, means literally nothing in the grand scheme of the Shane Wright story though. He's an incredible kid and player, and I can't wait to see what he does when (if?) the Frontenacs get back on the ice. I'd bank on him playing on next year's Team Canada as a draft-eligible, too.

G Brett Brochu (undrafted)

I thought Brochu was outstanding in the third period of the first Red-White game, thrusting himself into the third-string conversation with his quickness in the net and the way he got to loose pucks and rebounds around the crease. But he was going to have to continue to look like that to stay in the conversation and while he wasn't bad the rest of the way, he didn't maintain the lights-out level he needed to as an underdog coming in.

G Tristan Lennox (undrafted)

Among the five goalies Team Canada brought to camp, Lennox is probably the one I'm lowest on as an NHL prospect. He then gave up two goals on eight shots in his first half game on November 21, the first Red-White game, and he just looked a little shaky and slow throughout.

December 11: The following nine players were Team Canada's final cuts.

LW/RW Jamieson Rees (Carolina Hurricanes)

Rees was arguably the most involved player in Team Canada's camp through the first two scrimmages. He wasn't on my original roster when I made my picks but I thought he would make the final roster midway through the camp. I don't want to call him a pleasant surprise, because he's undeniably talented and pesky, but he was probably the player who exceeded my expectations more than any other. He didn't let a shift go by without making some kind of impact, whether that was chasing down a check to force a defender to rush their pass, circling the offensive zone with the puck on his stick before cutting to the slot, or going to the front of the net to get open for his teammates or fight for a rebound. Despite being a "loud" player, the kind who enjoys being in the thick of things, Rees has also always been deceptive and slippery, which was most noticeable in his ability on stop-ups or changes of direction to create separation inside the offensive zone. Rees is not eligible to return next year and he couldn't have played much better than he did, so this probably stings.

C Mavrik Bourque (Dallas Stars)

A long-shot to make the team in the first place, Bourque was most noticeable in the second half of the first period of the second scrimmage and into the second period. It was an impressive few shifts, showcasing his ability to use his linemates and execute under pressure. But it was ultimately short-lived and he wasn't much of a factor the rest of the way. Bourque is eligible to return to next year's roster and could factor in as a third or fourth-line player on that team.

LHD Lukas Cormier (Vegas Golden Knights)

If Cormier were to make the team, it was likely to be as a bit of a utility guy on the third pairing, or as a No. 7/8D who could step in and give the team a little more offence if one of the PP quarterbacks went down with an injury or illness. He was on a heater coming into camp and I was quietly pulling for him to continue to surprise people. He's got his fair share of detractors but I'm a big fan. He didn't jump out in the first two streamed scrimmages, though, and he was held off the scoresheet in all four games. This cut makes sense but I suspect he's a near-lock for next year's team.

LW/RW Samuel Poulin (Pittsburgh Penguins)

I felt like Poulin was a good choice for a bottom-six role on this team entering camp, and that his strength on the puck (especially on the cycle) would endear him to Team Canada brass over some of the camp's other bubble players. But he just wasn't a factor throughout the camp offensively, and there were other players who emerged as better options for a little further down the lineup. He also, if I'm being honest, wasn't off to the greatest start in the QMJHL given how dominant he should be (and often was last year).

LHD Ryan O'Rourke (Minnesota Wild)

I thought O'Rourke struggled with some of his gaps in the first two scrimmages. He got turned around and caught chasing a few times. Considering he was only going to make the team if he could really lock things down defensively (he was never going to be in the power-play conversation, nor was he likely to play higher than a six-to-eight role anyways), his cut doesn't come as much of a surprise to me. I suspect he'll be a prominent even-strength defender and penalty killer on next year's team, though.

LHD Donovan Sebrango (Detroit Red Wings)

Sebrango was actually a pleasant surprise throughout camp. I thought there were times where he forced the issue and tried to play beyond himself, but he was pretty consistently good from start to finish and he made it a round of cuts further than I expected he would as a result. That undoubtedly bodes well for his odds of cracking next year's team, a team I wouldn't have even said he was a favourite to make heading into camp.

Graeme Clarke (New Jersey Devils)

If there's one player whose play in camp merited inclusion on the team other than Rees', Clarke's that player. He did an excellent job playing off of the wall and into the slot while bouncing around various different lines. His line was consistently noticeable and productive, he didn't look out of



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place with Dylan Cozens and Connor McMichael in the opener, Seth Jarvis' best game was with him in the second scrimmage, and he had points in all four games. He wasn't just doing what he does best (see: shoot) either. I like his playmaking instincts throughout. A great start to a new season after last's was derailed by a shoulder injury. Tourigny even went out of his way to talk about how impressive his Ottawa 67's forward was on the eve of Friday's cuts.

Seth Jarvis (Carolina Hurricanes)

Jarvis came and went in flashes in the first two Red-White games, with a couple of excellent plays through traffic, but he wasn't consistent making things happen offensively and he just had to do that to earn a spot. He was a top-nine or bust guy. There were always going to be better players for the fourth line and older players who got the benefit of the doubt to be the extras. Jarvis had to play really well and turn himself into one of their eight best power play options at forward and he was just too quiet.

Gage Goulet (Tampa Bay Lightning)

That Goulet made it as far as he did and wasn't among the first cuts speaks volumes to who he is as a prospect and the way he played throughout camp. He scored the first goal of camp going to the front of the net to finish a rebound and he was consistently noticeable defensively and on the penalty kill on steals and lifts that took back possession. He made a strong case for a limited role as a fourth-liner who could penalty kill but Canada decided to go with higher-skill options. Love the way he hunts puck, though.

The standouts

LHD Bowen Byram (Colorado Avalanche)

If he hasn't been the best player on the ice, he's certainly been the most active. Byram looks like he's operating with some kind of magnetism or gravitational pull out there. Whenever he's on the ice, he's the one driving results, making plays, leading the rush, and creating to the front of the net. And it hasn't come with a ton of mistakes, or opportunities back the other way when he's below the offensive zone goal line, because his skating, which appears to me to be improved, always seems to get him back in the play defensively. His ability to bait opposing players, shade away from checks, and maneuver with the puck is going to make him one of the best players in the tournament. He has played like a rover without some of the consequences that typically come with those types. At this level, against the talent present in Canada's camp, it's been impressive to watch. He's everywhere and I expect he will (and should) be Canada's No. 1 D. By the sounds of it, he was also excellent in the two non-televised Red-White games at the tail end of the camp, with a goal and an assist on Wednesday.

C/W Peyton Krebs (Vegas Golden Knights)

Krebs, like Byram but at a different position, always seems to be on top of puck when he's on the ice, whether through a straight-line forecheck, quick bursts to loose pucks in the offensive zone, or even his anticipation without the puck defensively. Krebs is one of the best skaters in the camp, especially since explosive college invitees Alex Newhook and Dylan Holloway didn't participate in the Red-White games. That's particularly true from a standstill on the 50/50 races that happen over the course of a game (though he doesn't seem to slow down through his crossovers with the puck, either). I've also been impressed by Krebs' touch with the puck. He has executed a number of soft, little plays that have grabbed my attention for their difficulty or ingenuity. Head coach Andre Tourigny also spoke highly of Krebs' play on the wing in the untelevised third Red-White game, which gives him some serious versatility.

RW Jakob Pelletier (Calgary Flames)

A year after a concussion kept him from attending Canada's selection camp for the 2020 tournament, Pelletier has shown why he would've had a real chance at that roster — and why he should be on this one. He has played like he always does. Smart decisions, detailed in all three zones, rarely too cute, lifting pucks, getting open. He dictates without grading atop any single skill hierarchy in camp. He's exactly the kind of player who can play up and down an all-star team like this and help drive results

in a variety of roles, or with a variety of linemates. After the way he played in the first two scrimmages, it didn't come as any surprise to me when Tourigny pointed to the Pelletier's line (this time with Dylan Holloway and Alex Newhook) as Team Red's best in the third scrimmage, highlighting specifically Pelletier as a reliable presence.

"Pelts, when I coached him at the Hlinka-Gretzky tournament, he was really good. And he got injured in the tournament but before he got injured he was one of our top players. He was so good on both sides of the puck and he brings so much energy and detail," Tourigny added. "He plays the game the right way. And it's the same right now with us. Wherever we put him, we move him around, we put him on the left-wing, right-wing, play him on the special teams. And he's the kind of player that makes others better as well. He does a lot of good things."

C Kirby Dach (Chicago Blackhawks)

Dach's ability to protect the puck in the offensive zone has proven to be his great divider in camp, keeping opposing players on his hip for just long enough to make something happen. He's the kind of player who should be in the standouts section of a piece like this, but it's still noteworthy that he is. He has consistently made plays, kept offensive zone sequences alive, and controlled the flow of the puck when he's been on the ice. Doesn't hurt that he added four points in the third intrasquad game, either.

LW Connor McMichael (Washington Capitals)

McMichael was quietly excellent in all three intrasquad games. Like top-three-player-in-camp quietly excellent. When he's not getting open for slot opportunities of his own, he's sliding deft passes under sticks, going to the front of the net, or making quick decisions to put pucks in behind defenders. He has also been the most effective player in camp from below the goal line, keeping his head up to make a series of low-to-high plays that have resulted in chances and goals. His wrist will make him a threat from mid-range in the tournament but the rest of that could help a potential case for the event's end-of-tournament awards and all-star teams. If Alexis Lafreniere isn't returned, count on McMichael to be Team Canada's top left wing. He and Dylan Cozens (who has been used at centre but played right wing in last year's tournament) already have clear chemistry but I'd be interested in seeing Cozens moved to the wing and one of Dach or Quinton Byfield slotted between the two of them on the top line. McMichael is just so darn consistent.

C/LW Connor Zary (Calgary Flames)

I thought Zary played really well at last year's selection camp, when he was late invite after players like Pelletier and Ryan Suzuki had to miss it due to injury. That has continued this time around. He hasn't wowed me with any one play but he never seems to stray to the perimeter, he's constantly executing on give-and-gos, and his routes do such a good job of getting open. His underlying data in the WHL has always suggested that he's an elite finisher and one-touch creator who excels less as a primary puck carrier who is your go-to entry guy on a line, and more as an off-puck presence who does his damage on cuts, and curls, and heads-up playmaking in quick, aggressive bursts. That has played out in camp too. He was good in Game 1 when he was at centre because of how tenacious his approach was. But he was better on the wing in Game 2 with players who could draw attention (Dach and Philip Tomasino). He's a kid who was narrowly among my final cuts when I put my pre-camp roster together, but earned his spot on the team.

G Devon Levi (Florida Panthers)

After quarantining for nearly a month to make his participation happen, Levi was unflappable in his appearances in camp, closing with a 36-save shutout that sealed his inclusion on the team. I think Hockey Canada's early preference for their starter lays with the undrafted Taylor Gauthier but there's plenty of time for that to change and I don't think they've ruled out any of the three goalies (the Ranger's Dylan Garand was also really good in camp) for any of the three roles.

Captain Canada?

Though Hockey Canada hasn't yet named its leadership group for the tournament, my best guess as to what it looks like (based on the way



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players and staff have talked about them, past history in similar roles, their level of play, etc.) probably looks something like this:

C: Kirby Dach (Blackhawks)

A: Bowen Byram (Avalanche)

A: Peyton Krebs (Golden Knights)

A: Jakob Pelletier (Flames)

Though I think Byram is the guy who's really at the centre of the team on the player side of things (he's extremely personable and outgoing), and will be at the centre of their success, I think his light-hearted nature plays against him little on the coaching side of decision like this (even though they love him). Dach's the No. 1 centre, and the NHLer. He's the safe choice. With the other two, Krebs is just a leader through-and-through and Pelletier is a favourite of the coaching staff who has served as a captain with two QMJHL teams and is renowned for his work ethic and detail.

The two other names that are most likely in that kind of a discussion are Dallas' Thomas Harley, who is extremely articulate from a media standpoint and a player Tourigny has already used the word "leader" about, and Buffalo's Dylan Cozens.

An early lineup projection

Forwards

McMichael (WSH)

Cozens (BUF)

Dach (CHI)

Perfetti (WPG)

Byfield (LAK)

Krebs (VGK)

Holloway (EDM)

Newhook (COL)

Pelletier (CGY)

Zary (CGY)

Mercer (NJ)

Tomasino (NSH)

Extras

Quinn (BUF)

Suzuki (CAR)

Defencemen

Byram (COL)

Drysdale (ANA)

Harley (DAL)

Schneider (NYR)

Guhle (MTL)

Barron (COL)

Extras

Spence (LAK)

Korczak (VGK)

Goaltenders

Gauthier

Garand (NYR)

Levi (FLA)

Sportsnet.ca / How three 'fringe' hockey departments operate, and what teams use them for

Justin Bourne December 11, 2020, 1:14 PM

If you're even a casual NHL fan, there's likely a number of team operation departments you've become familiar with as being a standard. You don't flinch when you hear the words "Player Development Staff" or "Analytics Department," and have at least heard of "Sport Science," but ... are you sure you know what they do? In fairness, are we sure that teams themselves know what they do? (My guesses here are "probably not exactly" and "not always," for the record.)

Below is an overview to better understand just what these groups do within an NHL club, how much power they hold over the tangible team decisions fans see each day, and how they can be used and misused.

We'll start with what seems most necessary – I mean, of course you need to develop your prospects, right?

Player Development Staff

What they do in theory: They work with a team's prospects to help them become all they can be. They give young players the best shot to fulfill their potential. They take a team's fringe players and turn them into capital-P Players.

The issue: Everyone has one of these departments, which means by sheer math half the teams are doing a below average job with this admirable, but rather nebulous aspiration. (It's worth noting that even those doing a below average job today are probably doing exponentially better than teams were 20 years ago, even 10.)

What they do in practice: This would look very different from organization to organization. Given this is one of the few areas a team with financial clout can wield their advantage, here's where you'll see certain teams triple the less-funded ones in staff and resources. My experience with the Toronto Maple Leafs organization saw no expense spared here, including the thing that makes my co-worker Brian Burke most annoyed: affording the AHL team a second bus just for the players so rookies don't have to double up and can sleep better on the road after games.

I'll try to keep this more general and concise, so: the development staff starts each summer at development camp with each prospect and gets to know every kid on the ice, in the gym, and gets a sense for what they need. They help sort these talents for the organization, and from there, they try to put them in positions to succeed with workout programs that lead up to the season.

The best teams stay in touch with these players all throughout the next season with regular check-ins (and more if the players want), which may include in-person visits. The department will try to go through each player's video at different times and show them areas where they can improve. If they can get on the ice with them during the season, they will. The drafted hockey player – particularly those draftees of well-funded teams – have some safety nets undrafted players simply do not.

One key area of difference from org to org: how much development do your NHL "prospects" still require (and hey, what about the vets?), and are you willing to find time for that? In-season schedules can be jam-packed, so can you find opportunities to continue working on the skill of your team? Some coaches will say "we have to," some will tell you it simply isn't feasible.

Remaining Time -1:13



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Is Olli Juolevi ready to lock in his role in the NHL? | Over/Under Canucks Edition

The issues: Part of the problem with “player development” staffs is that few are exactly sure who’s good at it, what works (the growth of technology has muddied the waters further here), and how much success has really been had (aside from the department heads responsible for the whole operation). As prospects try-and-fail or try-and-succeed, so much can be chalked up to the attributes of those individual players. “Well, he was just a lazy kid” is just as easy as “Well, that guy was a god-given talent.”

That leads to obvious questions: How many more NHL players would a great player development staff churn out than a good one, or even a bad one? (One every few years?) How much better could a good prospect get with the right help? How much would they stagnate without it? And can anyone tell whether those involved made a tangible difference in either direction?

I worry that sort of vagueness lends itself to recently retired and well-liked players being handed vaguely defined “player development roles.” I think a ton of great teachers and mentors will obviously come from the NHL, more than anywhere else. Plus, when you know a player and like that player, when they retire, hey, maybe you’ve found the perfect fit for that role from within your organization.

But I’m willing to bet this changes as the years pass, where we’ll see how effective talented players from around the world who also have experience in teaching younger players -- and don’t have millions of dollars in the bank -- can be in these roles. To me, good player development is a “boots on the ground” job and I’m not sold every former NHL leader is 100 per cent willing to take that on to the extent necessary to achieve maximal gains. (Some are! Just saying the pool should be deeper here than the almost-exclusive hires of recently retired NHLers.)

That little footnote aside, there’s still just a lot of figuring out going on in these roles. How do you best support a developing player and personality? Some need more carrots than sticks, some need more emotional support, and others simply need to be pointed in the right direction. Catch-all methods don’t work, which begs flexibility of big organizations, which ... is never the strength of big organizations.

You can make the case that the need for good player development at the pro level is currently at its peak given the salary cap structure (and it being flat for years to come), while the understanding of how to use all the tools available is still in its infancy.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they’ve heard and what they think about it.

What they do in theory: They present the team with the details your eyes and brain can’t process in real-time. Between periods and after every game, coaches are presented with numbers, from how successful D-men were at defending the blue line, to their success on turning retrievals into breakouts, to how each line fared in shot attempts (and against which opposing line), and on and on.

They prepare info packs on upcoming opponents, optimal lineup configurations, and present big picture information about their own teams. They answer obscure questions like “What are the combined shot attempts for and against when Travis Dermott is on the ice playing his off-side against playoff-level opponents?” or whatever the obscure question is that a coach may have for them.

How anyone could hate on a team for having a department that provides answers to questions about situations where they previously flew blind is staggeringly dumb.

The issues: What percentage of total value should this input be given when paired up with eye test and informed intuition? How much weight do you give to individual stats when the answers lead to more questions? (In my above example, maybe you want to know how many of those games Dermott played with a specific partner, in which case sample

sizes grow smaller and smaller, and the information gets harder to value.)

And then there’s paralysis by analysis. If at some point the numbers give you information that ties your opinions all in a knot, can you step out of the Zach Galifianakis GIF and get back to just making the decision you simply trust the most?

The super-unique issue: Do the final decision-makers listen to them at all? I’m not asking “are they heard,” every team will go through the motions there, but are they actually listened to? This has been a major issue in the early going with analytics departments and NHL teams. You can’t be a team that doesn’t have people running numbers. That would be embarrassing and a PR nightmare, for all information is just that – information -- and you’re free to do with it what you will. So, you might as well have the information.

With that, some teams have hired analytics departments despite not believing in what they provide, and those voices are left internally unheard. They’re Milton in Office Space, left working in metaphorical Storage Room B, collecting a paycheck that’s an organizational rounding error which saves the team from being a troglodytic punchline.

Remaining Time -2:17

How do fringe players impress without any NHL exhibition games?

This has also been a failing on the side of analytics hires, to a smaller extent. Effectively communicating your ideas and speaking the language of those you’re trying to convince is part of almost every job, and there hasn’t always been a smooth conductor between the two groups to say, “This is what this means for our team, practically.” By and large though, where analytics departments have been shut out, it’s been a failing of close-mindedness from those uncomfortable with new ideas.

Strides have been made, huge ones, over the past five years. But I’d say a quarter of NHL teams have people in positions of decision-making power who’d just rather not hear from the analytics department at all. (Also, pulling numbers like “a quarter” out of thin air is not how these departments work, I assure you.)

And finally,

Sport Science

What they do in theory: They focus on squeezing the most possible juice from the fruit, trying to maximize every player’s ability for their individual gain, and in turn, the team’s. They try to minimize injury and illness, since being in the lineup as many nights as possible is a value for the team.

What they do in practice: They provide information to the coaching staff about who needs what to get the most out of them using a variety of data points, conversation, and their education. I’ll speak generally about my time with the Marlies as examples, though there’s a big range on how teams treat this aspect of the game.

Every player on the Leafs/Marlies wore what looked like sport bras for practice, which monitored their heart rates and their physical outputs (this wasn’t for the coaches to see, luckily for lazy players). If those in that department noticed players working as hard as ever and getting way less out of each stride, something’s off, and they’d work on getting that player right. (Was it a groin issue? A rest issue?)

\*I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

They had each player fill out a survey upon waking up every day about how they felt physically, about their mental health and more before they came to the rink. They operated as a go-between, advocating for the player while trying to get the most out of them for the team. They worked with the strength and conditioning team, they encouraged different training (like yoga), and tried to provide what each unique player needed. (Hint: the answer almost always involves getting more sleep, or possibly more rest and more sleep, or maybe more sleep.)

The issue: If you’re on the sport science team, the worst thing that can happen is players getting hurt and being unavailable. You don’t want



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players to be dragging on the ice, and you don't want players falling below expectations.

And so, the best thing to advocate for those players is rest, a la Kawhi Leonard. You'd want players to get more practice days off, to skip morning skates, and to not play unreasonable sums of ice time in games. Your job depends on presenting healthy players.

You can imagine how many NHL coaches would feel about being told Player X is unavailable yet again because the sport science team says they think they could use a little bit more rest. I mean it's pro hockey, everyone's tired, how will the rest of the team feel about this player sitting out yet again?

If you run an NHL team, part of the gig of being involved in a physical profession is being rugged and reliable. The NHL normally has an 82-game season followed by two months of rigorous hockey. Nobody wants a delicate sports car that can do great things in theory, but isn't road ready day in, day out. It's half the reason some hockey people love reliable steel-and-not-plastic, pickup-truck-style hockey players. Showing up is half the battle.

This is still an area of mild conflict, as of course coaches want healthy players who are able to be at their best. And if they knew giving them a day off here or there could aid that, of course they'd give it. But will it help? Will it help more than getting more reps in another area of the game, tired or not? Finding the line between protecting an asset and coddling players who'd of course rather not practice ... it can be tough to find.

There is no shortage of information coming to those who have to make decisions on an NHL team each day. What changes from team to team is who values what and how much, and I'm not sure there's ever going to be perfect answers to be found anywhere.

TSN.CA / Special door knock for a special Team Canada

By Mark Masters

TSN Hockey Reporter Mark Masters reports on the World Junior Hockey Championship. Team Canada practised on Friday at the Westerner Park Centrum in Red Deer, Alta.

Kamloops Blazers forward Connor Zary woke up early on Friday morning. It was hard to sleep knowing Hockey Canada's final cuts were looming. Then he heard a knock at the door.

"All the coaching staff and management was outside and Bear [head coach Andre Tourigny] handed me his phone right away and it was my family and I knew," the Calgary Flames 2020 first round pick said. "But when they said those words, that I was going to be part of this team, just, the emotion going through my head and through their faces ... that was special."

This scenario played out at 21 other doorways in the Cambridge Red Deer Hotel as Team Canada's World Junior squad was finalized. Hockey Canada let the parents of the players deliver the news and sometimes they got carried away and skipped a step.

"My mom was on FaceTime and she was cheering and congratulating me and she didn't tell me what she was congratulating me for," Prince Albert defenceman Kaiden Guhle, a Montreal Canadiens first-round pick, said with a smile. "So I had to ask her. She was so happy and it made it extra special."

Making it to the World Juniors in any year is special, but in this pandemic-interrupted season when playing opportunities can't be taken for granted it's even more meaningful. And this Canadian team was

especially hard to crack with 20 first-round picks among the 22 skaters on the roster.

"It didn't feel real until I hit the ice," said Saginaw Spirit forward Ryan Suzuki after Friday's practice. "You just see all the talent that's out there ... just how fast-paced the practice is. Right when I stepped on the ice it all hit me at once."

After an emotional day, the focus now turns to building chemistry so this incredibly deep group can live up to the sky-high expectations. There will be another two practices before the team travels to Edmonton to enter the bubble on Sunday night.

Button on Team Canada's final roster: 'I think they'll go undefeated'

With all 14 forwards being selected in the first round of the NHL draft, Team Canada's World Junior roster is supremely skilled, and it's not just the forwards that are impressive. TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button joins Gino Reda to break down the final roster for Team Canada and give his predictions on the tournament.

Add it all up and the players only had nine days on the ice during the 26-day selection camp. A 14-day quarantine eliminated much of the opportunity to make an impression.

"This was a deep group," said Alan Millar of the Hockey Canada management team. "It made us have to make some really tough decisions. We had to trust the process and trust the big picture."

"We did a good job at making sure we were staying level and not getting emotional about yesterday," said Tourigny. "It was more what happened in the big picture."

But, still, some players made the most of the four scrimmages. Millar identified seven players, in particular, who helped their cause.

"We're real pleased with the way our goaltenders have come together here the last couple of days," the Moose Jaw Warriors general manager said.

Prince George's Taylor Gauthier, Kamloops' Dylan Garand and Northeastern University's Devon Levi were named to the team on Thursday.

"On the back end, [Halifax's] Justin Barron and Kaiden Guhle are two guys who had real good camps and solidified themselves with our group," Millar continued. "Up front, the NCAA guys, [Wisconsin's Dylan] Holloway and [Boston College's Alex] Newhook have been impressive."

It was, therefore, no surprise that Barron and Guhle remained paired together at Friday's practice.

"It's tough to split them, to be honest," said Tourigny. "Why try to fix something when it's not broken. Right now they're tough to play against. Both of them skate well, have good size, can move the puck so we like what we see so far."

And Holloway and Newhook also remained together on a line with Flames prospect Jakob Pelletier.

"Our line's clicking really well," said Holloway. "Both guys are really fast players so getting in on the forecheck is pretty easy when they're going a million miles an hour. We got good communication on the bench and everything. We just click really well and had good chemistry right off the bat."

When Suzuki was contemplating his tenuous position at Canada's camp on Thursday, he reached out to someone who could relate: older brother Nick Suzuki, a centre with the Montreal Canadiens.

"I was pretty stressed out thinking about the final cuts so I was texting him and he said, 'You can't worry about that now. You did the best you could and you just have to leave it up to them.' He's always been by my side and always giving me tips."

An 18-year-old Nick Suzuki was cut at Canada's selection camp for the 2018 World Juniors before cracking the roster one year later.



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"That first year, after he got cut, he was pretty upset and that just gave him more motivation that next year to not take his foot off the gas that whole camp and [not] leave any stone unturned. The biggest thing he told me going into camp is you just got to make the best of every opportunity and you got to keep going."

Due to a serious eye injury last season, Suzuki missed out on a chance to make the 2020 World Junior team.

"Ever since I got back this was a goal of mine because last year I wanted to come to this camp and make this team," he said.

And now that he's made it, the London, Ont., native is looking to earn some bragging rights over his brother. Nick left the World Juniors without a medal following a heartbreaking overtime loss against Finland in the quarterfinals something his father reminded Ryan of on Friday morning.

"He actually said that Nick didn't get a gold medal so you can one-up him on that so that's what I'm going to try and do here."

After 26 days at selection camp, including 14 in quarantine, Hockey Canada whittled its roster from 46 to 25. Here are some other notable numbers:

20 - The number of first-round picks that made the team, including all 14 forwards. Last year's team had 10 first rounders with seven up front.

11 - The number of players on the roster who won a gold medal while playing for Tourigny at the 2018 Hlinka Gretzky Cup. That group includes Barron, Bowen Byram, Dylan Cozens, Kirby Dach, Gauthier, Holloway, Peyton Krebs, Kaedan Korczak, Pelletier, Braden Schneider and Suzuki.

9 - The number of players released on Friday. The final cuts included forwards Mavrik Bourque, Graeme Clarke, Gage Goncalves, Seth Jarvis, Samuel Poulin and Jamieson Rees, and defencemen Lukas Cormier, Ryan O'Rourke and Donovan Sebrango.

7 - The number of players who got cut at last year's selection camp and earned some redemption by making it this year. That group includes Thomas Harley, Holloway, Krebs, Newhook, Cole Perfetti, Schneider and Zary.

6 - The number of 18-year-olds on the roster. For the second straight year Sudbury centre Quinton Byfield is the team's youngest player. The other 18-year-olds are Garand, Jami e Drysdale, Guhle, Levi and Perfetti. Both Levi (Dec. 27) and Perfetti (Jan. 1) will celebrate birthdays in the Edmonton bubble.

5 - The number of players on the roster who have suited up in league games this season. Holloway played two NCAA games while Pelletier, Jordan Spence, Barron and Dawson Mercer all played games in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

3 - The number of Colorado Avalanche prospects on the team, which is more than any other National Hockey League team. Newhook, the 16th overall pick in 2019, and 2020 first rounder Barron join returning player Byram, the fourth overall pick in 2019.

2 - The number of Newfoundland natives who made the team. Bay Roberts' Mercer is back from last year's team and will be joined by Newhook, who's from St. John's. This is the first time two players from The Rock have made it to the same World Juniors since John Slaney and Chad Penney in 1992.

0 - The number of Hockey Canada events Jack Quinn was invited to before this year. The Ottawa 67's winger, who scored 52 goals last season, will be making his international debut at the World Juniors.

After producing just one goal and one assist in five games at last year's World Juniors, Wisconsin Badgers winger Cole Caufield is expecting to play a bigger role with Team USA this year.

"I want to bring the offence to the table," the Canadiens' 2019 first rounder said following a practice at the USA camp in Michigan. "On a personal level, I just got to put the puck in the back of the net, make plays and win games for us."

Caufield scored 19 goals in 36 NCAA games last year and is off to a strong start in his sophomore season with six goals and six assists in 10 games.

"I feel a lot more confident going into this tournament than I did last year," the 19-year-old said. "Obviously, I had a good start to the first half of the college season and I'll take that into the tournament."

Caufield has skated with draft-eligible centre Matthew Beniers so far at camp.

"He kind of draws guys towards him, which leaves me open so it's nice to play with a guy like him," Caufield observed. "He's always moving, which leaves me free and open most of the time."

And that's important considering the way Caufield prefers to play.

"I'm at my best without the puck and I think that will show a lot at this tournament," said Caufield, who excels at finding soft spots in opposing defences.

"He's a very special player," said Holloway, Caufield's teammate in Wisconsin. "Everyone is in awe of the way he scores goals, but the way he is away from the puck, he's gotten a lot better. His hands and shot, believe it or not, I feel like they've gotten better too."

Montreal Canadiens 2019 first round pick Cole Caufield scored just one goal for the Americans at last year's World Juniors tournament. Feeling more confident this time around, Caufield is looking to make more of an impact for Team USA in Edmonton.

Lines at Team Canada's practice on Friday:

Quinn - Cozens - Dach

Perfetti - McMichael - Krebs

Holloway - Newhook - Pelletier

Zary - Byfield - Tomasino

Suzuki (C) Mercer (RW)

Byram - Drysdale

Harley - Korczak

Guhle - Barron

Schneider (R) - Spence

Garand, Gauthier, Levi

The Athletic / 'I need help': How friends saved former NHL All-Star Mark Parrish

By Michael Russo

It's 9:45 a.m. on March 10, and Brian Lawton's pounding on the door of Room 332 at the Residence Inn in Secaucus, N.J.

Bang. Bang. Bang.

Nothing.

Then, louder, and still no answer.

Lawton's panicking now.

The night before, Lawton had knocked on the same door, and just like now, no answer. He called the room. No answer. He texted and texted. No reply ... until just before 10 p.m. when Mark Parrish, his fellow NHL Network analyst, finally texted back.



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Parrish vowed then that he was fine, merely tired. He was going to bed early and the two would have breakfast the next morning to talk things out.

Lawton was worried. He had an uncomfortable, heated conversation with Parrish hours earlier.

The dispute started after a worrisome pre-production meeting two hours before airtime. After the meeting, Lawton confronted Parrish and told him he wasn't fit to be on the broadcast. Lawton ordered an Uber that picked up Parrish at the studio and took him back to the hotel.

"No matter what, you call me when you wake up," Lawton wrote in a text. "If you wake up at 5 a.m., you call me. I have my phone on."

Lawton woke up at 6 a.m., and he waited for the call.

By 7, there was no call or text. Same at 8. At 9, Lawton called and still, no answer. He texted. No reply.

So now, after Lawton marches 100 yards down the hallway from his room, Room 302, he's beating on the door to Parrish's room.

After three or four minutes, Lawton's mind is racing. He fears what he's going to discover on the other side of the door. And then he hears a noise.

"Mark!" Lawton yells.

The door opens and there stands Parrish. His T-shirt is soaked with sweat. His hands are shaking. His eyes are bloodshot.

Relieved that Parrish is alive, Lawton walks in and looks around.

"Where is it?" Lawton asks.

Lawton searches the room. He looks under the bed. Behind the couch. In the fridge. In the bathroom.

"I didn't sleep a minute last night," Parrish says. "I felt like I was going to die. I had to have a sip of vodka every 20 minutes."

"Where is it?" Lawton asks again.

"It's in the freezer."

Lawton opens the freezer and pulls out the 750-milliliter bottle.

It's almost empty. How can anybody drink this much? he remembers thinking.

Lawton pours what little is left of the vodka down the sink. He drops onto the couch exasperated, then looks at the sad sight of this 43-year-old former NHL All-Star sitting in the desk chair next to him.

Mikko Koivu, Mark Parrish, Marian Gaborik

Parrish isn't only Lawton's television colleague.

He loves him like a "little brother."

Lawton, the No. 1 overall pick in the 1983 NHL Draft, became an agent after his playing days.

He recruited Parrish as a client in 1994, when the 17-year-old was lighting it up at Bloomington Jefferson High School in Minnesota and later at St. Cloud State. He was front row and center during most of Parrish's 12-year NHL career, until Lawton became a Tampa Bay Lightning executive and eventually their GM in the summer of 2008.

That was a month before Parrish was bought out of the final three years of his five-year, \$13.25 million contract with his home-state Minnesota Wild, hastening his downward spiral.

Parrish was already drinking too much at that point. But after two rocky years with the Wild, the humiliation of being publicly kicked to the curb in a place where he was once a homegrown hockey hero, sent Parrish onto a destructive path.

He was embarrassed and despondent and became more dependent on alcohol to relieve his pain, depression and anxiety. He was prescribed

medication by a neurologist to help with his anxiety and pounding head, but he quit taking those pills because alcohol did the trick. He kicked a heavy painkiller addiction not long after his close friend and former teammate Derek Boogaard died from an accidental overdose of alcohol and oxycodone in 2011.

But for years, family and friends, especially Lawton and former teammates and longtime pals Ben Clymer and Bret Hedican, tried to intervene. Parrish's alcohol consumption was often the main topic of conversation during their get-togethers.

"It was really hard to watch. You're losing a friend," says Hedican, a Minnesota native and Florida Panthers teammate during parts of Parrish's first two years in the NHL. "I remember saying to Ben one time, 'I just don't want to have us get that call,' that call that says, 'Mark died,' and we didn't do anything about it."

By the time Lawton was dumping out the last of Parrish's vodka in that New Jersey hotel room, the mood had shifted.

"Lawts, I need help."

"Are you asking me for help?"

"Yes, I'm telling you, Lawts ... I need help."

"OK," Lawton says, "Here's what I'm going to do."

Lawton tells Parrish to clean up, jump in the shower. That he'll be back in a bit with a plan.

Lawton had already put a lot of people on alert.

His first call was to Dan Cronin, the director of counseling for the NHL/NHLPA Substance Abuse and Behavioral Health Program, who helped get Parrish admitted into a rehab facility in Arizona.

Lawton asked the NHL Network to change Parrish's return flight to Minnesota. He called Clymer, who bought Parrish a connecting flight from Minnesota to Phoenix and also booked himself a ticket in the seat next to Parrish. Clymer called Parrish's wife, Nicholle, and asked her to pack a bag with her husband's clothes and bring it to his office.

After a cold shower, Parrish called his wife and broke down. He remembers "feeling relieved and exhausted."

When Lawton returned to Parrish's room, he laid out the plan: Uber to Newark airport. Flight to Minneapolis. Meet Clymer there. Take 6:02 p.m. connecting flight to Arizona. Drive to rehab facility.

But Parrish pushes back. I can't go home? I can't kiss my wife goodbye? I can't explain to my kids why Dad is leaving? He's bargaining now.

But Lawton and Clymer had gotten close to convincing Parrish to seek help in the past. They worried he'd back out if his family tugged on his heartstrings. They held firm. This is the way it has to be.

In the basement of Parrish's home in a western suburb of Minneapolis, there is all sorts of memorabilia from his playing days.

An All-Star Game jersey from 2002 when he scored 30 goals for the New York Islanders. His 2006 Olympic jersey. A Kodak picture he once took with Mario Lemieux. The puck from his first NHL goal during the 1998-99 Panthers' season opener. Parrish scored twice that night, including the winner over the cross-state rival Tampa Bay Lightning.

And there's an enormous bar with a couple of Northland vodka bottles still on the shelf.

Parrish is one of four partners in the Minnesota-based vodka company. His wife boxed up the rest of their alcohol and gave it to a friend. And those Northland bottles? Filled with water because "it seems silly to have a bar with no bottles."

A wine cellar next to the bar is padlocked. Only Nicholle, who works in the wine industry, knows the combination. She needs a place to keep wine, plus Mark needs some Northland bottles for giveaways and signings.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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How Parrish began drinking such a “grotesque amount of alcohol” that “I was literally liquifying my brain” is a story familiar to many alcoholics and family members of alcoholics.

“We’re spectacular liars, alcoholics,” Parrish says. “I got to learn firsthand how powerful the disease is. I’d keep telling myself, ‘Don’t make another drink,’ then I’d be making that drink and would tell myself, ‘Don’t make it so stiff.’ It’s like my hand wouldn’t listen. The hardest part for me, my parents (Barb and Gene) taught me to be a good person, and I’ve been so proud of how honest I was for the majority of my life, that I was a man of my word and could be trusted and relied upon.

“But I’ve told so many lies. You don’t realize the emotional toll that it takes on everyone else when you’re so wrapped up in it.”

He suddenly pauses: “I had no idea how far down I was. Where to start? ... Where do I even start?”

Start on March 9, the day before he entered rehab. Parrish’s flight landed in New Jersey late the night before, and like “any good alcoholic,” he stopped at a liquor store on the way to the hotel for his customary 750-milliliter bottle of vodka. What did him in, he says, was lunch across from the hotel at Houlihan’s. He rounded out that meal with “four or five” doubles.

A few hours later, he stumbled into the conference room at NHL Network studios for a pre-production meeting with a dozen people, bumped the back of Lawton’s chair, and spilled Lawton’s 31-ounce iced green tea all over the table.

Initially, Lawton thought the spilled tea was merely an accident. “Clean it up. No big deal. Sit back down.”

This is the meeting where analysts contribute ideas so the production staff can plan the upcoming show. They discuss that evening’s docket of games and provide topics they’d like to talk about on air.

“As I’m sitting there, Mark was struggling with his comments. It was a red flag to me,” Lawton says. “Mark didn’t really say a ton. When he did, it wasn’t what I would call his best stuff as an analyst. That started to get me concerned. We’re sitting next to each other, and at some point I realized that I could smell alcohol. This is about 4 o’clock, and we’re going on national TV at 6.

“I don’t really get super nervous, but I started to get hot flashes. The meeting goes on and my temperature rises to about 102.”

When the meeting ended, Lawton hustled to the door to intercept Parrish. He asked Jamie Hersch, who was hosting that night’s show, to stay, too.

Lawton asked Parrish what was wrong and Parrish became instantly defensive, saying he was tired from a long week of broadcasting the Minnesota high school state hockey tournament.

“Mark was super emotional,” Lawton says. “And I’m super uncomfortable because we’re very good friends. I keep thinking to myself, ‘I’m doing him a service.’”

But as things got increasingly contentious, Lawton started to worry, “Am I misreading it? Maybe (spilling) the drink was an accident. Maybe I really didn’t smell alcohol. Maybe he really is just tired.”

Parrish yelled back, “I can’t believe you’re stabbing me in the back like this.”

“I look at Jamie, and her eyes are welling up, and I started crying, too,” Parrish says. “Lawts (never) actually said he knew I was drinking. He kept saying, ‘You seem off, Parry, you seem off, you’re sick, yeah, I think you’re sick.’ ... Go have a nice dinner, get some sleep and make sure this is only a 12-hour flu and not a 24-hour flu.”

Lawton ordered Parrish an Uber, sent him back to the hotel and told the producers Parrish wasn’t feeling well. They arranged to have analyst E.J. Hradek, who worked an earlier show, stay and fill-in for Parrish. During the Uber ride back to the Residence Inn, Parrish tried to convince himself that this was “a one-time thing.”

You just made a mistake today. Get a good night’s sleep, come back tomorrow and prove your worth, just like after a bad game.

Parrish ordered a steak to his room and says he didn’t drink a drop of alcohol. He didn’t hear Lawton at his door a little later and responded to his texts by replying that they’d talk in the morning. He went to bed around 10.

A little after midnight, Parrish woke up. He had a tingling sensation up and down his arms and across his chest, like pins and needles. His heart was racing. Maybe a panic attack? “I guess the jig is up. I’m busted.” As the pain intensified, so did the anxiety.

He thought if he didn’t get a good night’s sleep, he’d possibly lose a job he loves.

He paced around his suite and then went outside and walked around the courtyard. When he returned to his room, that tingling sensation and racing heart didn’t let up. Then he remembered that bottle of vodka.

I’ll just have a couple drinks to calm this panic down.

In the midst of the second drink, he fell asleep.

Three hours later, at 4:30 in the morning, he woke up again.

The pins and needles had turned into nails, daggers even. His bed was soaked with sweat, his heart was racing. He contemplated calling 911.

Parrish grabbed his phone to call his wife, but it was 3:30 a.m. in Minnesota and he didn’t want to spook her and the kids.

“And, of course, I’ve got the rest of that unfinished drink from earlier sitting on my nightstand,” Parrish says. “I remember, I had my phone in one hand and I picked up the drink with the other. I took one sip, and the pain just, man, it just stopped like that. That was my spiritual moment, my aha moment ... that God shot, as they call it in AA.

“I just remember looking at my left hand and looking at the drink and saying, ‘Oh shit, it’s you.’ It dawned on me right then and there that I needed help. That I obviously couldn’t do it alone.”

Nicholle, his wife of 16 years, had been asking Parrish to slow down his drinking for a couple of years at that point. He often considered going cold turkey but always found an excuse not to.

“I was lying to her about taking days off when I never would,” Parrish says. “Never, until this moment, did I actually really think I had an issue, yet I drank more than the average bear.”

Like Nicholle, his friends were not surprised Parrish had hit bottom. Clymer, a year younger than Parrish and a friend since their high school days at Bloomington Jefferson, had gotten close to sending Parrish to rehab a year or two ago.

But nothing in their past friendship could prepare Clymer for what he saw when he met Parrish after his flight from New Jersey landed in Minnesota.

From the moment Parrish passed through security at Newark, he started drinking. By the time he got to Minneapolis, he looked broken. His hands were shaking uncontrollably. He was sweating so profusely that he had to change out of the shirt he was wearing and into ... a Northland Vodka T-shirt, which matched his Northland Vodka hat.

Parrish was going to rehab looking like a vodka advertisement.

He had already had plenty to drink, but he ordered more at the airport in Minnesota.

It was almost like “my last hurrah,” Parrish admits. “Like, if I’m going to rehab ... I’m going drunk.”

Clymer called the facility in Arizona to ask if he should try to stop Parrish from drinking. They told him, while they’d obviously like him as sober as possible, to not worry about it now. Clymer guesses Parrish had 16 units of vodka while he was with him.



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"He was pretty low, super embarrassed about having to do this," says Clymer, 42. "I kept telling him I was proud of him and that 'the biggest way you could disappoint people would be by not going through with this and by continuing what you're doing.'"

What boggled Clymer's mind, the more Parrish drank on that flight to Arizona, the more sober he seemed to get.

"He was not well when I first saw him," Clymer says. "His skin color wasn't proper. And then when we were getting off the plane, he was totally normal."

As Parrish and Clymer walked to the rental car shuttle, they walked past a bar.

"I want to have my last drink with you," Parrish said.

Clymer teared up.

"I wanted it to be his last drink, too," Clymer says.

They rented a car, then Clymer drove Parrish to the Meadows facility in Wickenburg, Ariz. They arrived just before 10 p.m.

In the parking lot, Clymer made Parrish change out of his Northland shirt.

"I'm like, 'Dude, I'm not bringing you into rehab wearing a vodka shirt,'" Clymer remembers saying.

Clymer felt like he was dropping one of his kids off for camp. But he felt a tinge of guilt as he left because he and Lawton hadn't been completely honest about one major detail.

Parrish thought he was going to be in Arizona for a few days, maybe a week, not 45 days.

"It felt like a shitty thing to do to a friend, but I'm thinking, 'Maybe now's not the time to tell him he's not coming home in a week,'" Clymer says.

And part of it was hope.

"It felt weird driving away, knowing that my life was going to continue on, and his life was going to take an absolute U-turn," Clymer says. "I was really happy he was doing it, but I knew the fight that was ahead of him."

In the 25 hours before arriving at Meadows, Parrish figures he drank enough vodka to fill more than two 750-milliliter bottles.

"I don't remember what my blood alcohol was, but I kind of wish I do," Parrish says.

After taking a number of tests upon arrival, Parrish was led to his room.

"I just slept," Parrish says. "I just remember being so tired and I don't know, obviously it had a lot to do with the amount of alcohol, but just mentally shut down."

Three or four days later, when Parrish was more alert after coming off some heavy withdrawal drugs, he worried about how obvious it would be to the world that he suddenly went missing.

Clymer set up a meeting with Parrish's partners at Northland to explain what was going on, and Nicholle emailed The Athletic's Islanders beat writer, Arthur Staple, to let him know, without getting into details, that Mark would be out of the loop for a while. The two co-hosted a twice-a-week podcast.

Another of his concerns was his radio duties. On Wednesdays and Fridays, Parrish appears on the "Power Trip," the No. 1-rated morning show in Minnesota, on KFAN, one of the highest-rated sports radio stations in the United States.

Clymer met with the show's hosts, Cory Cove, Chris Hawkey and Paul Lambert to fill them in. The three were relieved. They knew Parrish had a severe drinking problem.

Since retiring, Parrish says vodka, and the occasional whiskey, helped him fight off severe anxiety.

"I'd wake up in the morning and my to-do list would be, 'Go to the laundromat, go to the dry cleaner, call Mike' — four or five nothing things that should be no big deal for a retired guy in his 30s," Parrish says. "And I couldn't even decide which one to do first. I would just spin. I would be walking in circles and finally Nikki would be like, 'Why don't you just take a shower?'"

"I'd take a shower and come out and I'd be just as anxious. She'd have to walk me through just the simplest things. And it started wearing on me. Every morning was a roll of a dice as to whether I'd wake up OK or my anxiety was off the charts."

The simplest tasks became too much to handle. Parrish figured one drink couldn't hurt. That's not enough to get him drunk. But then, "One drink turns into two. ... If I had to pick up the kids, my brain's telling me to have a drink. I started to have a couple drinks before picking up the kids."

When his wife found out, she was horrified. "All of a sudden, Nikki's picking up the kids and she's driving everywhere," Parrish says.

At one point a few years ago, after an alcoholic episode, Mark's older brother, Geno, was so worried, he actually lived in the house four days a week for more than a month.

Parrish used to coach high school hockey at Orono. He says he resigned in part so he could keep drinking and not get in trouble. When he worked on the broadcasts of state high school tournament games, he says he never drank on the air but always had one waiting for him afterward.

In October 2018, Parrish was arrested for drunk driving. It never made it into the public airways, so other than Nicholle, Parrish hid the arrest from most of his family and friends until recently. But instead of the incident being a wake-up call, he says the guilt sent him into a downward spiral.

"When I look back at all the times Nikki tried to help me, tried to slow me down ... she just couldn't because I didn't believe (I had a problem)," Parrish says.

There's a red, 25-ounce CamelBak water bottle that Parrish still has. It's a reminder about how far off track he got. Before almost any drive, "I'd prepare myself a drink."

The bottle held the same amount of liquid as one of his 750-milliliter vodka bottles, so he'd fill the water bottle to the top, half water, half vodka.

The "Power Trip" airs from 5:30-9 a.m. weekdays. Parrish is on the entire 3 1/2 hours Wednesday, the final two hours Friday.

Parrish loves doing the show and has become close friends with each of the hosts. But like everything else in his life, it causes anxiety.

"On the days that I would go into KFAN, the last couple years, that water bottle would pretty much be gone," Parrish said. "I mean it's a 15-minute ride that early in the morning, and that thing would be gone by the time I got into KFAN."

The crew from the morning show suspected it wasn't water in that bottle that never left Parrish's side. And the look in his eyes sometimes told Hawkey, "He wasn't completely there with me."

The first time Parrish checked in with Lawton and Clymer from rehab, they couldn't believe how much better and happier he sounded.

"It took me awhile to make some phone calls," Parrish says. "For some reason, my brother was the hardest one to call. I don't know why. It took me a couple weeks till I called him, and he definitely let me know he was not happy."

What Parrish didn't realize until he talked to Lawton the first time was that roughly 36 hours after he arrived at rehab, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the NHL to suspend its season.

That meant no viewers would wonder why he wasn't on NHL Network anymore. When he wouldn't be on KFAN the next few months, the pandemic could be an easy excuse.



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"I was there five or six days when I realized I was staying 45," Parrish says, laughing. "One of the therapists was like, 'OK, you've got 39 days left.' And I was like, 'Wait, what?' I just thought, 'Lawts, Clymer, those sons of bitches tricked me!'"

All joking aside, the first week was tough.

Parrish was put on major withdrawal drugs and was heavily sedated for much of that time.

It wasn't until the second week that the nurses and doctors told Parrish that he had been dubbed, "Miracle."

"They couldn't believe with the lab tests, everything that I had, where my body was at, what my numbers were, that I was still alive," Parrish says.

The biggest concern other than his liver was evidence of wet brain, something doctors were able to diagnose with an MRI.

"It's basically cell death," explains Dr. Marvin Seppala, an addiction treatment expert and the chief medical officer at Hazelden Betty Ford in Center City, Minn. "Anytime we drink even one shot, one beer, one glass of wine, we're killing brain cells. But we have so many of them that for people who don't drink heavily, the social drinkers, you kill a few, it's no big deal. Not going to notice. If you really have a severe alcohol use disorder, you can develop wet brain, but we hardly ever see that anymore. It's a rare situation."

Seppala said it's an extremely serious condition that can cause difficulties with cognition and memory and eventually severe dementia. He has never treated Parrish, but because Parrish was told that the type he had was reversible, Seppala assumes Parrish was run through a battery of cognitive and memory testing.

"During the course of treatment, what you see with people that have cognitive damage from alcohol use is that in the first month, they get a lot of it back," Seppala says. "Then the next five months, there's a slow return of memory. After six months, you got what you're going to have, basically."

While at Meadows, Parrish attended "family" group meetings, met daily with a therapist and started AA meetings in the evenings. He has been stringent in attending all of his meetings since, albeit virtually because of COVID-19. Between AA, large group meetings and a couple of special meetings that include current and former pro athletes, mostly NHLers, Parrish has meetings Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights and Tuesday and Wednesday mornings.

On the "Power Trip," one of the most popular things they do occurs every Friday morning. It's called the Initials Game, and it's not easy. Lambert, Hawkey, A.J. Mansour, Parrish and other contributors act as contestants, and let's just say that for the longest time, Parrish wasn't doing well. Soon after returning to the show, Parrish won his first Initials Game in a calendar year. He has won the contest two of the past five weeks.

"The joke is my brain's working again," Parrish says.

Parrish learned a lot of life lessons in rehab, and thought a lot about his past.

How did he fall so far?

His brother, Geno, 45, who also played hockey at St. Cloud State, said the irony is in college, he was the party animal and it was Mark and former Huskies teammate Matt Cullen who used to come to house parties and drink cranberry juice and water.

Mark says he didn't have his first taste of alcohol until his 20th birthday.

It wasn't until he turned pro that he started to drink more often.

He then became addicted to painkillers.

He actually remembers breaking his leg at age 15, being put on painkillers and liking them immediately.

His rookie year, he had his wisdom teeth removed and was reminded how much he liked what the painkillers did to him. And as more and more

injuries and aches and pains occurred along his NHL career, he got hooked.

Parrish's voice gets somber as he brings up Boogaard, who died in Minneapolis 9 1/2 years ago during his first night home after leaving rehab in Malibu.

"It tears me up. I was running side by side with Boogey," Parrish said. "I think about that all the time. How that beast of a man lost the battle ... and how somehow I survived it? ... I was doing way more painkillers than he was."

One summer while Mark still played for the Islanders, Geno lived with his brother.

One night, Geno noticed Mark nodding off while driving the two of them to the marina. "Halfway there, we were going over the yellow line in the middle of nowhere, and I look over, and his eyes are almost shut," Geno says. "I grabbed the wheel and was like, 'What's wrong with you?'"

Geno took the keys from his brother and drove home later. After that, Geno noticed lots of signs of addiction. Fatigue, asking the same questions over and over again, a poor memory. He also discovered his brother was not only getting painkillers prescribed by doctors, but also through the mail. He confronted his brother, and Mark "starts throwing out all the stuff like, 'My knees and my hip and my ribs and my ...' All these excuses.

"So the summer I lived with him was really eye-opening."

Parrish surmises that he got hooked on painkillers while playing for the Islanders in the early-2000s, but things got a lot worse during the 2004-05 lockout and magnified after the Wild bought out the final three years of that five-year contract in 2008. He was humiliated.

"Did I need the painkillers for the pain? At times, maybe," he says. "But primarily, it was just to kill the frustration, the heartache, the disappointment of what happened here in Minnesota."

His ego took a hit as he spent the final four years of his career playing mostly in the minors after hundreds of games in the NHL. He played 62 games during that stretch with Dallas, Tampa Bay and Buffalo, but "mostly played the Reggie Dunlop ('Slap Shot') role" for AHL teams in Bridgeport, Norfolk, Portland and Binghamton.

One day at rehab, Parrish decided to sit in on a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. He says he had the epiphany, "Holy crap, I was a fricking painkiller addict. I raised my hand and I shared my story and it felt amazing to admit it. It wasn't even something I realized I was hiding."

When Boogaard died, Parrish says for the most part he was scared straight. During a painstaking, very difficult "summer of hell," Parrish says he went cold turkey off of painkillers. He admits he has used them since after some surgeries, like one on his shoulder, but he says he's always made sure to get off of them.

He says he's lucky to be alive because he often dangerously mixed alcohol with painkillers. That's what ended his friend's life.

"I got a horseshoe and about 8,000 four-leaf clovers jammed up my ass, I think," Parrish says.

Parrish has been sober 135 days. If you're doing the math from March 11, his first day of sobriety in rehab, you may sense something's not adding up.

On July 28, about 30 minutes after someone dropped off some bottles of vodka for Mark to sign, he got into an argument with his wife ... and he drank.

"I had been around alcohol so many times since (rehab), but whatever snapped that day, I just remember being upset about something and next thing you know, I was sitting on the couch with half a bottle of vodka in my hand," he says.

Nicholle texted Clymer. Clymer told her to take the kids and leave, that he'd be right over.



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When Clymer arrived, Parrish handed him the vodka with a look of shame and Clymer took away Parrish's recovery coins and sobriety medallions.

A little while later, Geno and their parents arrived and, soon after, Parrish began violently throwing up. His mom called an ambulance and Parrish was taken to the hospital.

Parrish says he hasn't had a sip of alcohol since. But he knows he's not magically cured.

For one thing, his anxiety issues remain.

One of his first nights out in public after returning from rehab was June 18 for his 16th wedding anniversary dinner at a restaurant in Minneapolis.

As soon as they arrived, he wanted to leave. "But it was our anniversary. I was just terrified. White as a ghost, I was almost shaking, sweating," he says. "The restaurant was almost empty, but that did nothing for me. But I got through it, and I remember getting back in the car and I was just wired. I was so excited that I made it through."

Parrish keeps track of his days of sobriety on his phone.

His AA sponsor recently told Parrish to stop counting days like he's trying to reach some kind of athletic milestone. If he gets to 1,000, he's not going to earn a silver stick (or vodka bottle) from Alcoholics Anonymous.

"You never heal. You're just in recovery," Parrish says. "Because of COVID, nobody's going to bars, but I've gotten pretty good in restaurants. I ask for their best kiddo cocktail or what one of Nikki's friends makes me, Lemadine."

That would be lemonade and grenadine.

One elephant in the room? The vodka company. Parrish still owns a piece of it and doesn't plan to sell his share.

In his first week of rehab, Parrish met with a psychiatrist.

"What do you do?" she asked.

"Well, I own a vodka company."

"You're not serious," she said, while laughing.

"I actually am. And my wife sells wine."

Parrish says he spent much of the 45 days in rehab "mentally preparing" to be able to live life while still owning a piece of the company. His Twitter avatar is a Northland bottle.

"I'm not around the alcohol on a day-to-day basis. I like what the company has to offer, the business model, what we do for the community," he says. "Do I still get nervous? Yes. I've actually canceled a few appearances because of fear. But every time I've just sucked it up and gone, I've been fine."

And Nicholle is happy he's working toward being a better man, father and husband.

"When he finally admitted he needed help, I felt a million pounds lifted off my shoulders that I didn't realize I was carrying," she says, tearing up. "It's just nice to be able to rely on him again. ... He's a bigger participant in our kids' lives again. They can tell he's just more present."

Geno tried to urge his brother to go to rehab countless times, as much as anything for his kids, 12-year-old Gianna and 10-year old Turner. "I have repeated year after year after year, 'Mark, you're not going to regret what you did to your friends. You're not going to regret what you did to your family. You're not going to regret the money that you blew, the opportunities that you blew, the jobs. You're going to regret not remembering raising your children.'"

Geno may not have thought so, but Mark was taking that to heart all these years.

"They were so young when I really started to have a drinking problem," Mark says. "They don't even know their father sober. That hit hard. It still

does. There's still days where I wake up and the depression gets me on that one.

"I want to be an example for them and we've been honest with them and if I can't make it to Turner or Gianna's practice cause Daddy's got to get on one of his calls to make sure he stays sober, they understand. I've had talks with both of them. There's been a lot of apologizing.

"But you know, they don't seem to really care so much about the apology. It's just that Daddy doesn't drink anymore. And, of course, Turner goes, 'That's good, Dad. You know what? I'm never going to drink, too.' I just said, 'Thanks, son. I appreciate the support. But this is Daddy's issue, not yours.'"

Geno says he's grateful Lawton was there to intervene that night at the NHL studios.

"If Brian Lawton had not been there at the perfect time, the perfect place, the perfect vulnerable state in my brother's life, we might not be talking about this right now," he says.

And Lawton is thankful Mark was willing to listen. "People do get broken, but they get fixed, too," Lawton says. "I always believed that this is a chance for Mark to have a really great life. I feel he's got a path to a great future now. And I was losing hope."

Parrish is a Minnesota hockey hero and public figure, so at times he wonders if he's walking around town wearing a big neon sign on his forehead that says, "Alcoholic."

"I don't believe Mark likes holding secrets," Hawkey says. "I think this is going to be such a relief for him. I'm sure it's embarrassing and I'm so sorry he's going to have to go through that. But I think this is going to be such a cleansing for his soul, for his life."

Parrish doesn't want to hide anymore. He doesn't want to lie anymore. And he doesn't want to feel like garbage anymore.

"There's a lot of people that are battling this, a lot more than people realize," he says. "And I think I'm in a fortunate position to give them a voice. But mainly, just honesty. I just want to be honest. I'm tired of being uncomfortable around people."

He also likes waking up every morning with a clear head, "not being hungover and not trying to figure out where I can go sip a bottle of vodka without anybody noticing," he says. "I like the responsibility now. I get to be the driver."

Sportsnet.ca / Five pressing issues for NHL, NHLPA to resolve ahead of new season

Sportsnet Staff@Sportsnet

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Whenever the NHL and NHLPA are involved in CBA-related negotiations, the biggest hurdle to jump is always the one about money. And while the two sides agreed to a CBA extension over the summer, the economic realities of managing a business during the pandemic led the NHL to seek a renegotiation of sorts, where escrow and deferral amounts on player salaries were requested to be reconsidered.

It led to a cooling of talks between the two sides and even some pessimism they'd eventually work it out. So, when Elliotte Friedman reported on Monday that they had agreed to keep the economic framework in place, the biggest obstruction to the start of a new season was seemingly removed. Full steam ahead, right?

As with anything in this most unusual year, it's not that straightforward.



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The two sides remain in talks about how the season will take shape and there are still a number of issues to sort through, though none appear to be as big as the monetary considerations. There is generally still lots of optimism we'll get a season, with the goal now to begin on Jan. 13. That could still be delayed, though, depending on how the pandemic develops around North America in the coming weeks.

"We just never know what we're going to be able to do and not do," Friedman said on Sportsnet 590 The FAN's Hockey Central this week. "I do have some people telling me that even though they understand why the league and players are targeting Jan. 13 -- you want people in that mentality of, 'Get ready we're going to play' -- I think there are some who feel it may not happen until the beginning of February because we just might need more time. We'll see. But that's what our target is."

"The players were told last week to be prepared for the possibility of Jan. 13, so it looks like we're gonna go full steam ahead as much as we can towards that and see what curveballs COVID throws us."

The fact is, many questions remain about how this will all work. For example, some teams are in hot spots with local regulations that severely limit how many people can gather in one place, leaving it uncertain whether or not they could open training camp in their home rink, or play regular season games there when the season opens. San Jose is one such as example of this, as is Montreal. The Winnipeg Jets were in the same boat, but this week were given clearance by Manitoba's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Brent Roussin to open their camp at home. It's those types of situations that are ever-evolving and could further complicate matters in the coming weeks.

But there's even more to figure out between the league and its players, who are still regularly discussing a number of things they must resolve before a season is confirmed. Before anything moves ahead officially, both the players' association and BOG must vote on all aspects. Following the latest BOG call on Wednesday, another is expected some time next week.

Here are some of the more notable points still on the table.

## 31 Thoughts: The Podcast

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Rosters are going to have to be larger this season. As we see the NFL and college sports leagues play without the same kind of bubble the NHL successfully implemented this past summer, a number of positive tests are complicating games and seasons. That is also the case ahead of the World Junior Championship, as a number of teams — including Canada — have had positive tests before travelling to the Edmonton bubble in a week's time. It's gotten to be so much that there is concern whether the tournament should even be able to go ahead.

Since the NHL and the players prefer to not return to a bubble for a full season, they also will have to prepare for the increased likelihood of positive tests.

On top of that, some teams will have a harder time calling players up from their AHL teams. The three Western Canadian franchises, for instance, all have American-based farm teams, so cross-border travel and quarantine requirements won't allow for short-notice recalls.

The solution may be in an expanded roster and/or taxi squad, where a few extra players are allowed to be part of the team, perhaps without being on the official roster, on call for injuries and the like. Of course, with so many teams over or right near the salary cap ceiling already, how these expanded rosters or taxi squads will function under the current financial setup is to be determined.

"There's talk right now of having rosters of 25 or 26 players, plus potentially another four players that could be part of a taxi squad," Chris Johnston reported Tuesday night.

It's possible a number of AHL players could be part of those taxi squads, the type who would be among the first call-ups when injury hits in a

normal season. There's talk that, perhaps, those players would still earn their AHL salaries while on the taxi squad, but be given NHL per diem.

It's unclear what an AHL team could do if a few of its players are on a taxi squad instead of the AHL roster this season. These expanded NHL rosters could also influence what some of the next steps are for the remaining UFAs.

"They've gotta nail down these taxi squads," Friedman said. "I wouldn't be surprised if some guys who were more sort of deeper players on the roster or potential AHL/NHL guys, they wait to see what the taxi squad rules are and say, 'OK is there a situation that's better for me that I might go for because of what the taxi squad rules might be?'"

## Dec. 8: "They're Grinding Away At It, There's No Question"

There is a lot to consider under this banner.

In the playoff bubble, players were tested daily. Two labs, one each in Toronto and Edmonton, handled the processing of those tests, and results were returned within 24 hours. With teams now spread out again in a less centralized format, it's not clear how often players will be tested, who will handle the processing, how fast those tests will be reported back, or what the protocol would be should a player return a positive. How long will they be out for? What has to happen for a game to be postponed? This is all to be determined.

Another factor is player opt-outs. For the summer playoffs, those who did not want to compete were allowed to opt-out without any financial penalty. Players will surely be allowed to opt out for the coming season if they so choose, but will they have to forfeit a portion, or all, of their salary — or will they be able to do so again without penalty?

"They're grinding away at protocols, what happens if someone tests positive? How do players who opt-out want to do so? What's the penalty, if any, in terms of financial?" Friedman said.

And how will players who do test positive be listed on the injury report? In the playoffs, all injuries were designated as "unfit to play" and, as we now know, there were no positive tests in the bubble anyway. But in the NFL this season, players who test positive are more transparently put on a reserve/COVID-19 list. How the NHL chooses to navigate this is another open question.

It's long been expected that a seven-team Canadian division would be a necessity for this season to eliminate cross-border travel and quarantine restrictions. On Tuesday, Gary Bettman all but confirmed this as a likely outcome.

"There are a lot of things we have to do to return to play," Bettman said. "For us to return to play, we're not going to play 82 games, obviously, and we have travel issues because of the restrictions at the border between Canada and the U.S. You can't go back and forth, so we're actually going to have to realign."

"If everything stays the way it is, we're probably going to have to have a Canadian division and realign in the U.S., and we're trying to focus on dealing with all of those challenges."

While time zones obviously are not a factor in creating the Canadian alignment, they will be in re-aligning the three American Divisions, though there is no perfect fit. In an effort to limit long-distance travel, teams will be pooled as geographically close as possible. As reported on Wednesday, the NHL has outlined a proposal for these American divisions, and it looks like this:

Unsurprisingly, much of the Metro Division remains the same, with some alterations to make room for a couple of displaced Atlantic Division teams. Likewise, the California teams, Vegas and Arizona all stay together from the Pacific Division. But some teams, like St. Louis, are caught in the middle under this proposal. It should be noted that this is not a final decision yet and still needs to be voted on by the Board of Governors and the NHLPA. It's also believed there is some debate about St. Louis and Minnesota's placements.

Whatever this settles at, it's going to be a look unlike anything we've seen.



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For now, the league is aiming for a 56-game season, though again, that could change if the start date needs to be pushed back further due to COVID-19 complications.

"I just think that we're at the mercy of so much, I bet they're modelling everything," Friedman said on Sportsnet 650 The FAN's The Program. "They're modelling 56 games on the 13th. They're modelling 48 games on Feb. 1. I'm sure they're doing all this stuff. All you can do is prepare for anything and expect anything."

It's also to be determined what this will mean for playoff formatting. If the league announces its playoff format when it finalizes details on the coming season, the most likely outcome is that four (or five if they have a play-in round again) teams from each division will qualify for the playoffs, and then play through that bracket to a semifinal. How the league proceeds from there is hard to know, and could depend on travel restrictions or government allowances at the time. Could the league leave this undefined for now, and remain more flexible to other formats months down the line?

Another open-ended question surrounds how often travel will be required within these divisions. With long-distance travel a concern, the idea has been floated that this year's schedule could look somewhat like baseball's, where a team flies into a city and plays that host multiple times before moving on. It's also not clear if the schedule will be balanced. For instance, could the Maple Leafs play the Eastern-most Canadian teams more often than the West to limit cross-country travel?

"If you're having a division where four out of seven make the playoffs, you feel you have to make it as even as possible," Friedman said. "Would it be a slight edge East-East, West-West? Yes I think so. But I also think they feel if you're in a situation where these teams are competing against each other to make the post-season it can't be incredibly unbalanced. I would also say that if COVID dictates less long-term travel for whatever reason, maybe that changes."

Built in to all the schedule considerations is a question on when the critical dates will land. Things like the trade deadline (usually end of February), free agency (usually July 1) -- when will they now fall on the 2021 calendar?

The NFL got by without any pre-season games this season, and it appears the NHL may follow suit. As Friedman reported on Monday, no exhibition games appear likely at this time.

Time is of the essence to get as many meaningful games into a regular season as possible.

"They don't want the training camps to be that long," Friedman said. "I don't think the players want it to be that long, they feel that they're in good enough shape, they've all been skating, they've all been practicing, they feel they're ready to go."

"I think the other thing too is, in a time where you're dodging COVID at every corner, you just don't want to waste time on things that don't matter," he continued. "Why add an extra trip? Why add another potential exposure? I think that's how teams look at it ... and you can't make money on exhibition games now because you can't have fans."

As cases begin to climb in the NFL and we're seeing that league have to massage its schedule, how would the NHL handle a situation where games are forced to be postponed, given the schedule is already going to be compressed? What is Plan B in case local regulations make it harder to play in every home arena?

While the players weren't too crazy about going into a multi-month bubble again, it appears there could be a contingency plan for shorter term hubs to deal with this potential issue.

"I do think they have been looking at something," Friedman said. "What it comes down to in a lot of ways is what makes more sense financially? If it's a hub setup, the league handles a lot of those costs. If it's a team setup, the team handles a lot of those costs."

"If it's a team setup, you get your own sponsorship money back into it. If it's not a team setup there's a question of how much more do you have to pay or give back?"

"It won't be a bubble, it'll be more like a hub in and out. Some of the cities that are being considered for it are New Jersey could be one, Philly could be one ... but again, depending on what the local rules are. Nashville could be one. I do think that's not preferred. The players don't want it and generally I think teams don't want it unless the costs indicate it makes sense. I think they are looking at that kind of a possibility, but as it stands right now I don't believe it's the preference."

It's also likely that the league builds some kind of buffer into its schedule to allow postponed games to be replayed at a later date.