



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 28, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

With empty buildings and 56 games, what a short, strange trip this NHL season will be

By Luke DeCock

As much as the impending return of the NHL is wrapped in a comforting blanket of normalcy, this is going to be a very weird winter and spring. Weird enough to make last summer's Toronto and Edmonton bubbles seem like normal relics of the past. Weird enough to make shortened post-lockout seasons -- and the NHL has had a few of those -- feel unabridged.

Getting together at a couple sequestered spots to wrap up a suspended season was one thing. There was a novelty about it that helped it all fit together. Starting from scratch, from soup to Stanley Cup, and playing in the NHL's normal rinks, is only going to highlight how strange playing professional sports in a pandemic really is.

We're getting used to it, though. Baseball and the NFL have played in their stadiums and traveled from town to town and been able to move things along. They have shown the path forward for the NHL and NBA, not always a smooth one, but still.

The Carolina Hurricanes at least have the advantage, with a hiccup of a training camp and no preseason games, of returning essentially the same team that lost to the Boston Bruins last August. Enter Jesper Fast. Exit Justin Williams, Joel Edmundson and Trevor van Riemsdyk. The bad taste lingers.

"What's great about having kind of that same group back is they suffered here and they want better things, and I think that's what you're going to see out of those guys," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Monday.

There were no guarantees this would happen. Labor strife is never far from the surface in the NHL, and while it may seem unthinkable for this season not to happen, it would have been unthinkable at one point for the NHL not to participate in the Olympics, and that happened.

"Everyone just wants to play," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said. "I'm happy we've got a pending deal. There's going to be some sacrifices. Everyone's made sacrifices at this time. These are small sacrifices, for us to play a game."

A 56-GAME NHL SCHEDULE IN EMPTY BUILDINGS

So many of the basic assumptions of an NHL season are already out the window. In the sport with the tightest salary cap, the league and union have already carved out all kinds of accommodations, including a so-called taxi squad of reserve players ready to step in as needed. That seems like a common-sense plan from the outside; from inside the salary

cap, it's a fiendishly complicated accounting scenario. There are countless other wrinkles like that. A hard cap system relies on certain bedrock assumptions to make the numbers work. It is not built for the exceptional.

As the 56-game schedule is finalized, with games only against division opponents and the Hurricanes in the mash-up Central Division, reunited with old foes from the dormant Southeast Division and thrown together with new friends from elsewhere, expect to see baseball-style series, where a team comes into town for a pair of games instead of just one. The close quarters and forced familiarity are fully expected to breed contempt, especially with only one team from the division advancing to the NHL's final four. A lot of shoulders will bump together as everyone tries to squeeze through the only exit.

And empty buildings: That's going to require some adjustment, especially at PNC Arena. Up in Winnipeg, Paul Maurice is going to end up telling a lot of stories about Greensboro over the next few months, even by his standards. Truth be told, there was a night or two in the early oughts when it wasn't much better in Raleigh. (Halloween 2000 vs. Tampa Bay, announced attendance: 7,016.) Those days are long past, of course, and the shuttering of doors for safety reasons comes just as the Hurricanes' attendance was skyrocketing, up 44 percent over the past three seasons.

It's going to be short, it's going to be fast, it may be nasty, but it will be a hockey season.

'REAL' HOCKEY AMID THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The one thing we learned, above all else, in July and August and September was that hockey abides. Even in the most soulless of environments, in empty buildings and neutral sites, it was still playoff hockey between the boards. There were certainly quirks -- teams certainly seemed more willing to pull the chute facing insurmountable deficits than they would if they were headed home to their fans for a Game 6 -- but it was as close to "real" hockey as we were going to get at that point in the pandemic.

Now imagine it playing out across the country, in home rinks, still without fans. It's a different kind of vibe. Stranger. The bubbles, with all their prepackaged NHL branding, felt like an invitational, a new spin on the NCAA tournament. Now all those empty seats will be in team colors.

It really will feel like a home game, and yet not at all like a home game. It really will feel like a hockey season, and yet not at all like a hockey season. But far better than the alternative.



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Carolina Hurricanes release 2020-21 schedule. Here's who they play and when.

By Jessaca Giglio

The Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday announced its schedule for the upcoming 2020-21 season.

The Canes open at the Detroit Red Wings on Jan. 14 and are scheduled to play their first home game on Jan. 21 against Florida. The NHL announced last week that teams will play 56-game seasons and start on Jan. 13 due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The NHL shifted teams into four divisions and put the Canes in the Central with seven other teams — Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Detroit, Florida, Nashville and Tampa Bay.

The Hurricanes announced on Twitter this week that it will start the season without fans at home games.

Here's who Carolina plays and when.

CAROLINA HURRICANES' SCHEDULE

Thu. Jan. 14 at Detroit	Mon. March 1 at Florida
Sat. Jan. 16 at Detroit	Thu. March 4 Detroit
Mon. Jan. 18 at Nashville	Tue. March 9 Nashville
Tue. Jan. 19 at Nashville	Thu. March 11 Nashville
Thu. Jan. 21 Florida	Sun. March 14 at Detroit
Sat. Jan. 23 Florida	Tue. March 16 at Detroit
Tue. Jan. 26 Tampa Bay	Thu. March 18 Columbus
Thu. Jan. 28 Tampa Bay	Sat. March 20 Columbus
Sat. Jan. 30 Dallas	Mon. March 22 at Columbus
Sun. Jan. 31 Dallas	Thu. March 25 at Columbus
Tue. Feb. 2 at Chicago	Sat. March 27 Tampa Bay
Thu. Feb. 4 at Chicago	Sun. March 28 Tampa Bay
Sun. Feb. 7 at Columbus	Tue. March 30 at Chicago
Mon. Feb. 8 at Columbus	Thu. April 1 at Chicago
Thu. Feb. 11 at Dallas	Sat. April 3 Dallas
Sat. Feb. 13 at Dallas	Sun. April 4 Dallas
Tue. Feb. 16 Columbus	Tue. April 6 Florida
Fri. Feb. 19 Chicago	Thu. April 8 Florida
Sat. Feb. 20 Chicago	Sat. April 10 Detroit
Mon. Feb. 22 at Tampa Bay	Mon. April 12 Detroit
Thu. Feb. 25 at Tampa Bay	Thu. April 15 Nashville
Sat. Feb. 27 at Florida	Sat. April 17 Nashville
	Mon. April 19 at Tampa Bay
	Tue. April 20 at Tampa Bay
	Thu. April 22 at Florida
	Sat. April 24 at Florida
	Mon. April 26 at Dallas
	Tue. April 27 at Dallas
	Thu. April 29 Detroit
	Sat. May 1 Columbus
	Mon. May 3 Chicago
	Tue. May 4 Chicago
	Fri. May 7 at Nashville
	Sat. May 8 at Nashville



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NHL postpones Carolina Hurricanes' 2021 outdoor game

By Steve Wiseman

The Carolina Hurricanes will wait at least one more year before participating in an outdoor hockey game.

The NHL announced Wednesday the outdoor game scheduled for Feb. 20 at Carter-Finley Stadium is postponed, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"While we are extremely disappointed that we will not be able to host an outdoor game this season, the health and safety of our fans remains our top priority," Hurricanes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We look forward to hosting the game in the near future and rewarding our incredible fanbase with an unforgettable experience."

The Canes home game at Carter-Finley was scheduled to be the 12th NHL Stadium Series game and the 32nd NHL regular-season outdoor game overall. Carter-Finley would have been the sixth college football facility to host an outdoor hockey game, joining Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor,

Michigan, Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis, Maryland, Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, Notre Dame Stadium in South Bend, Indiana, and Air Force's Falcon Stadium in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

After years of discussions and negotiations with the NHL and N.C. State, the Hurricanes were selected for their first outdoor game experience last year. At the time of the announcement last February, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon was "relentless" in his pursuit of the event.

The NHL Stadium Series began in 2014 and the Hurricanes anticipated a crowd of at least 50,000 for the game. The NHL usually books 4,700 hotel rooms for a 10-day period before and after an outdoor game. In a written statement to the Centennial Authority, which oversees PNC Arena, Waddell said outdoor games generate around \$22 million in economic impact.

Carolina Hurricanes' plan for a shortened NHL season: Get hot early and stay hot

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said there's only one way to approach a 56-game NHL regular season.

"Find a way to get hot early and continue to stay hot," Staal said Monday during a media call.

The NHL announced Sunday the 2020-21 season would crank up Jan. 13, 2021 and begin training camps Jan. 3. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said that will mean about eight practices, no exhibition games, then jump into the fire and go at it.

"It's play for real," he said. "You don't tip-toe in."

For the Canes, it will be much like July, when the NHL began its "Return to Play" postseason format during the pandemic and the 24 teams involved more or less rushed through a training camp. Or 2013, when the NHL lockout ended in January and teams had little time to prepare for a 48-game season and sprint to the finish.

"With a shortened season every game will be that much more heightened," Staal said. "Everyone will need to be prepared right away and our group has got to jell quickly."

And without fans to urge them on. The Canes said Monday that after consulting with local health officials, there would be no fans allowed at PNC Arena for the start of the season but noted the "hope" was the policy could change during the season.

The Canes did that in July. There were no coronavirus issues, the camp was productive and the Canes won their first three games, sweeping the New York Rangers, in a playoff qualifier once in the Toronto bubble.

"We can't have a bad start. It's too hard and not a long runway to catch up," Brind'Amour said.

Brind'Amour said 25 players are in Raleigh going through informal workouts at the team's new practice facility at the Wake Competition Center. They're eager, he said, to get going.

No one is bemoaning the Canes' divisional placement in the NHL's new alignment for the 2020-21 season. While the East Division looks a lot like the Metropolitan of years past, the Canes have been put in the Central Division for its 56 games.

Not that it looks a lot easier in the Central. Tampa Bay won the 2020 Stanley Cup. The Dallas Stars lost in the final. But the only Metro holdover is Columbus, and the rest — Chicago, Detroit, Nashville, Florida — will make for a different look, feel and challenge.

There's no Alex Ovechkin one-timers to fear, no trips to Madison Square Garden, no Canadians teams on the schedule. But a lot of Lightning.

"Most of the teams we haven't played a ton," Staal said. "It's obviously weird we're going to play those teams the whole year, which maybe will cause some new rivalries."

Count on that. Play a team eight times in 56 games and some fierce rivalries can quickly be hatched.

The top four teams in each division will advance to the Stanley Cup playoffs, and the first two rounds will be among divisional teams. As Brind'Amour put it, that's a lot of "banging heads" for the players.

"When you've got to do it over and over and over, that's where the rivalries really get cooked up," he said. "It might be a breath of fresh air for our guys to kind of create a little more rivalry with other teams. But at the end of the day, they just want to play. It doesn't matter. Play anybody."

Another different look this season? Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said he anticipates having advertising decals on the team's helmets — but not the



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jerseys — for the first time as NHL teams look to recoup what will be substantial financial losses.

CANES SEEKING THIRD STRAIGHT PLAYOFF BERTH

The Canes, seeking a third straight playoff appearance, will enter the new season with last year's team all but intact. Former captain Justin Williams has retired but forward Jesper Fast was signed as a free agent. The turnover was slight.

It's also a team, Brind'Amour said, that won't be lacking for motivation. After beating the Rangers in August, the Canes

were bounced out of the playoffs for the second straight year by the Boston Bruins. That stung, again.

"It didn't end the way we wanted it to end," Brind'Amour said. "I think that's the fuel here, the fire. We don't want to end like that.

"That's the great thing about having that same group back. They suffered. They went through that together and we want better things. I think that's what you're going to see out of these guys."

Game on! NHL, players officially agree to start a 56-game season on Jan. 13.

By Chip Alexander

It's game on, hockey fans.

The National Hockey League and the NHL Players Association have formally agreed to start a 56-game regular season on Jan. 13, 2021, it was announced Sunday.

Unlike the NHL's 24-team "Return to Play" format used to conclude the 2019-20 season, the Stanley Cup playoffs will have 16 teams this season in the traditional best-of-seven series format. The top four teams from each of the four divisions, including the all-Canadian "North" division, will advance to the playoffs.

The Carolina Hurricanes, seeking a third straight playoff appearance, have been placed in the newly formed Central Division. The division also has the Tampa Bay Lightning, the 2020 Stanley Cup champion, along with the Columbus Blue Jackets, Chicago Blackhawks, Dallas Stars, Detroit Red Wings, Florida Panthers and Nashville Predators.

Under the new format, the Canes will play each team in the division eight times, which should make for intense intradivisional competition. The first two rounds of the playoffs also will be intradivisional.

Training camp will begin Jan. 3. The seven teams that did not participate in the 2020 postseason can open camp Dec. 31.

"The National Hockey League looks forward to the opening of our 2020-21 season, especially since the Return to Play in 2019-20 was so successful in crowning a Stanley Cup champion," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said Sunday in a statement. "While we are well aware of the challenges ahead, as was the case last spring and summer, we are continuing to prioritize the health and safety of our participants and the communities in which we live and play."

CORONAVIRUS PROTOCOLS, GAME SCHEDULE

The NHL and NHLPA will release health and safety COVID-19 protocols, transition rules, dates for the 2021 NHL draft and free agency, and the 2020-21 schedule in the next few days. The league conducted extensive testing for the coronavirus

during the Return to Play postseason setup, which was held at two sites in a protective "bubble."

"The Players are pleased to have finalized agreements for the upcoming season, which will be unique but also very exciting for the fans and Players alike," Don Fehr, NHLPA executive director, said in a statement. "During these troubled times, we hope that NHL games will provide fans with some much needed entertainment as the players return to the ice."

The NHL and NHLPA agreed that travel should be minimized as much as possible during the pandemic. There still are plans to play the games in the home arenas, although many could be played without fans because of differing coronavirus restrictions. There also could be games held at "neutral site" arenas, given the pandemic restrictions in different parts of North America.

NO NHL PRESEASON EXHIBITION GAMES

Under the agreement, there will be no preseason exhibition games. The regular season will end May 8 and the Stanley Cup playoffs sometime in July.

The NHL "paused" the 2019-20 season in March because of the rapid spread of the pandemic. The league and players agreed on a postseason format, with abbreviated training camps held in late July and then the competition starting in August in the hub cities of Toronto and Edmonton. Tampa Bay clinched the Cup in Edmonton, beating the Stars in six games.

Now, the Lightning and Stars will be among the Canes' divisional rivals.

NHL DIVISIONS

North: Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Vancouver.

East: Boston, Buffalo, New York Rangers, New York Islanders, New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Washington.

Central: Carolina, Tampa Bay, Columbus, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Florida, Nashville.

West: Anaheim, Arizona, Colorado, Los Angeles, Minnesota, St. Louis, San Jose, Vegas.



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Unlike last summer's playoffs, NHL's new temporary divisions may play to Hurricanes' favor

By Luke DeCock

Not since the draft lottery ping-pong balls bounced their way in the spring of 2018, delivering Andrei Svechnikov to their doorstep like an unwrapped gift, have the Carolina Hurricanes enjoyed such good fortune at the hands of the NHL.

When the league restarts next month -- if all goes as planned -- with a 56-game season played entirely within four separate divisions, the Hurricanes appear all but certain to land not with their usual foes in the Metropolitan Division, the 1927 Yankees of NHL groupings, but in a much softer spot.

Because the NHL has to put all seven Canadian teams in the same division because repeated border crossings just aren't feasible at this point in the COVID-19 pandemic, the other divisions have been redrawn. Based on the most recent and likely final proposal, the Hurricanes would avoid not only their usual division opponents like the Washington Capitals and Philadelphia Flyers and so on but the newly added Boston Bruins as well, and instead join a Central-Southeast mashup that has two of the NHL's worst teams, the Chicago Blackhawks and Detroit Red Wings.

Since teams will only play within their divisions right through the first two rounds of the playoffs, that essentially makes the Hurricanes one of six teams for four playoff spots instead of one of eight -- and they'll feel pretty good about their chances of finishing ahead of the Florida Panthers and Nashville Predators, too. Then it comes down to measuring themselves against the Columbus Blue Jackets, Dallas Stars and Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Hurricanes were willing to play in either division, and there are certainly pluses and minuses to both -- the travel would be dramatically easier in the northeast, and from their perspective they're a playoff team no matter where and who they play -- but from a competitive standpoint, playing 16 games against the Blackhawks and Red Wings is going to make it an easier slog, physically and mentally.

All of this remains predicated on the Canadian government allowing the seven Canadian teams to resume play, which is likely but not assured, and everything still needs to be finalized between the NHL and NHLPA, which is never assured. There

Hurricanes sign defenseman Roland McKeown to one-year, two-way contract

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes announced Friday they had signed defenseman Roland McKeown to a one-year, two-way contract that will pay him \$700,000 on the NHL level or \$100,000 on the American Hockey League level this season.

The Canes also have loaned McKeown to Skelleftea AIK of the Swedish Hockey League.

"Roland had a solid season in the AHL last season and it is important that he get back on the ice to continue his

development," Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "Playing in the Swedish league is a great opportunity for him to do just that."

McKeown, 24, had 24 points (4 goals, 20 assists) in 61 games and served as team captain for the AHL's Charlotte Checkers in 2019-20.

McKeown has 84 points in 271 career AHL games with Charlotte. He made his NHL debut on Nov. 4, 2017 at Arizona and has played 10 career NHL games with Carolina.

are a thousand issues beyond the division setup that still need to be negotiated, from the basic (how many players can come to training camp?) to the complex (if there's a "taxi squad" of reserve players, how would they fit into the salary-cap system?). The NHL has two important conference calls scheduled for Sunday to dig deeper.

But as things stand, it would be a tremendous break, one that creates a much larger margin of error for the Hurricanes to make the playoffs, dramatically so.

This wasn't always the case. It's actually been very much up in the air over the past month. The Hurricanes have bounced back and forth, swapping spots again and again with the Pittsburgh Penguins as the NHL has tried to find the right balance between competitive balance, geography, traditional rivals and television appeal.

In the end, it didn't make TV sense to break up the Flyers and Penguins, to the Hurricanes' benefit. All those years Hurricanes fans have complained about being overlooked by NBC? It worked out in their favor this time.

It's a dramatic change from last spring, when the NHL not only expanded the playoffs -- something that would have ended the Hurricanes' decade-long playoff drought in any number of years previously -- but forced the first no-doubt Carolina playoff team in a decade to play an extra round. That it ended up being against the New York Rangers, who the Hurricanes hadn't beaten since the Clinton Administration, was just the cherry on top.

The Hurricanes exorcised their Rangers demons only to run up against the Bruins, again, but they may have managed to avoid both of them in this ad hoc redivisioning, as well as the Capitals, who figure to be substantially improved under Peter Laviolette.

A season after the NHL created a playoff format that threw a huge roadblock in the Hurricanes' way, the league has created a regular-season format that, on paper at least, plays to their advantage. The Hurricanes haven't made the playoffs in three consecutive seasons since they were the Hartford Whalers. They may never have a better chance to do it here than this abbreviated season.



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Water leak causes \$250,000 in damages at PNC Arena, home of the Carolina Hurricanes

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes could soon be back on the ice but the lead-up to an NHL season already has resulted in one costly surprise at PNC Arena.

Some Canes employees returned to work at the arena this month to discover that a water leak in the CanesVision audio/visual control room and server room had caused \$250,000 in damages.

The center-hung scoreboard was not operational during Saturday's N.C. State-Campbell men's basketball game, the first event in PNC Arena since March because of the pandemic. That wasn't a huge issue with limited attendance at the game, but there were no video replays on the board for the players, coaches, a few family members and media.

It's expected the video board will not be fully operational until late January, Centennial Authority executive director Jeff Merritt said in an email sent to authority members.

The authority's finance and its building and construction committees discussed the issue Monday, recommending that \$262,500 be approved for restoring the CanesVision system, including \$12,500 in fees for the authority's audio/visual consultant.

The authority has planned a full renovation of the CanesVision system that will cost \$3.3 million. That could be completed in the summer of 2021 and be operational for the fall.

The source of the water damage has not been determined. After an inspection of the roof, six small holes were discovered near but not directly over the control room, which is on the fifth level of the arena. An HVAC system above the room also was inspected.

Merritt noted in his email that some CanesVision employees for Gale Force, the Canes' parent company, returned from furlough Dec. 7. He was soon informed of the damage.

Merritt noted in his email that insurance could reimburse for some of the equipment replacement.

THE ATHLETIC

How we'd run the Hurricanes: Finding the right deal for Dougie Hamilton

By The Athletic NHL Staff

As an extension of the NHL Future Power Rankings, which look ahead to how teams will stack up three seasons from now, we are diving into what each team can expect and what moves it can make to produce the best outcome.

The Athletic will break down what each team needs to do to, or should do, to take the next step toward contention. James Mirtle will give advice based on the salary cap situation. Dom Luszczyszyn will dive into the analytics and look at what each team has on his Stanley Cup checklist. Scott Wheeler and Corey Pronman will answer four key questions about the team's prospects. And Eric Duhatschek will propose a game plan for the general manager. Then the local beat writer will put it all in perspective with a reality check.

The Cap Situation

The final year of the Alex Semin buyout (which dates back to 2014-15!) and a bonus overage from last season rob the Hurricanes of \$3.7 million off the top.

That, plus nearly \$30 million spent on the blue line, helps get them right snug against the upper limit.

Having five defensemen making more than \$4 million is a bit unorthodox, although that depth protects them in case of injury. I could see the 'Canes moving someone like Jake Gardiner if they feel like a prospect like Jake Bean is ready to contribute more in the NHL, however.

The good news about Carolina is its skaters are almost all young and they're almost all paid fairly. This final year of Andrei Svechnikov's ELC is going to be a vital one to make some hay given his new deal will bite into 2021-22's finances.

The Hurricanes are going to have a chance to really re-envision their roster next summer if they want to, as there'll be nearly \$30 million in cap space and some big names going UFA, including both goaltenders and Dougie Hamilton, who will be difficult to replace.

This team is close to a contender as is; if it could shed a midsize contract for more help up front and/or an upgrade on Petr Mrazek, that could put it up into the upper echelon of the league. — James Mirtle

The Analytics

The Stanley Cup Checklist is based on research done earlier this year looking at the average value for players at every position from the past 10 Cup champions. It's based on the best-of-the-best each year, making it a high bar to clear and it means no team will have every box checked off, but the more holes a team has filled, the closer it is to being a Cup contender. A name in a specific box means he's in the right ballpark for projected value compared to past Cup winners, with some on the lower end and some on the higher end. Using an age curve, we made note of what each team already has on their roster signed for each of the next three seasons.

Let's take a look.

I really hope the acquisition of Brady Skjei doesn't hurt the team's chances of re-signing Hamilton, because he's the difference between this team being a Cup contender for years to come or being a team on the playoff bubble. They're close enough now that they only need a few tweaks, but losing Hamilton would be a huge setback. With Svechnikov also needing a new contract and no goalies on the books next year, things might get dicey.



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That there's no goalie signed past this year might be a blessing though as it's the one piece this team really needs. Petr Mrazek and James Reimer are fine stop-gap solutions, but they arguably aren't Cup contending goalies. A center behind Sebastian Aho is also needed, but the hope is that Vincent Trocheck bounces back to that level after some rough recent seasons in Florida, or that Martin Necas takes that step. It's possible, but neither are slotted at that level here.

Overall it's hard to quibble too much with Carolina's current path and the team's moves to get there. Get Hamilton locked up, find a goalie and stay the course. That's really it as this team has a solid young core that's capable of contending over the next few seasons. — Dom Luszczyzyn

The Prospect Pipeline

Who is on the verge of getting here?

Forwards Seth Jarvis, Ryan Suzuki, Noel Gunler and Dominik Bokk and defenseman Jake Bean are the team's top prospects. Bean looks on the doorstep after being the best defenseman in the AHL. The forwards look years away though. Jarvis could move the quickest and arrive in one-to-two years but the rest may need a lot of time to develop.

How good will they be when they get here?

Jarvis and Suzuki project as top-six forwards, with Jarvis having the most potential of anyone in the system to be a top-line forward even if not the likely outcome. Gunler and Bokk have top-six talent but they may be bottom-six forwards due to some deficiencies in their games. Bean could be a quality top-four defenseman.

What positions do they play, and do we have excesses or deficiencies?

This is a very deep pipeline at forward. The defense depth is decent but not as impressive as the forwards. There is a lack of a goaltender of the future in the system.

What does our prospect pool tell us about where we are in a competitive cycle?

The Hurricanes have a strong roster with some very good young players already up and some good ones on the way. They don't have true star-caliber talent in the pipeline though. They are a competitive team and have players who will supplement the core and give them cheap production. It also won't solve their goaltending issue. — Corey Pronman

The Game Plan

I have a great deal of admiration for the work GM Don Waddell has done so far — adapting to an owner who believes in disruption, but at the same time, working in a league that gravitates toward low-risk and predictable behavior. There's a fine line that needs to be walked here, and Waddell's done an excellent job of straddling it. Two tasks loom, however. One is sorting out what to do with Hamilton, in the final year of a

contract that pays him \$5.75 million annually and at 27, presumably looking for a big payday, a la Alex Pietrangolo or someone else in that remuneration ballpark. The Hurricanes are actually a team that could lose a piece as big as Hamilton and survive, because of younger players such as Haydn Fleury and Jake Bean, who are inching their way incrementally up the ladder. If Hamilton's ask is more than owner Tom Dundon wants to pay, then a priority will be maximizing trade value for him, rather than letting him walk away. At some point, they'll also need to sort out the goaltending and specifically whether the 28-year-old Mrazek can get you deep down the playoff road — or if you need an upgrade there. Mrazek and James Reimer were a good combo last year, but both are on expiring contracts. The chance to shop at the Columbus Blue Jacket store for a value buy such as Joonas Korpisalo or Elvis Merzlikins may tempt Waddell at some point. It would tempt me. — Eric Duhatschek

The Reality Check

While I appreciate Eric's sentiment that the Hurricanes could "survive" without Hamilton, I tend to agree with Dom on this one: The Canes need to get him signed.

He paces the team and this is a team that thrives on its active defense. I think the mentality of maximizing trade value then sending them away before they hit free agency is savvy in certain situations, but unless someone like Connor McDavid or Nathan Mackinnon becomes available it's a no from me. The Canes employed that strategy with Justin Faulk to help them get to where they currently are, and now they're staring at their Cup window. You sign your best player when you're right on the cusp. Losing Hamilton would force the Hurricanes to revamp their system.

My ears perked up at the idea of Korpisalo or Merzlikins on the Hurricanes, though. Goaltending is clearly the Canes' biggest question mark heading into this season, and depending on how it goes they'll either re-sign Mrazek or scour the market. I tend to believe they really like Mrazek and want him to succeed (obviously), so I think they're inclined to keep him but at the same time aren't afraid to go in a different direction. If I'm running the Canes, I'm paying very close attention to the goalie market (and Darcy Kuemper) all season.

I agree with the panel here that the Hurricanes are about a goalie and a mystery minor tweak away from Cup contention. Figuring out if the solution to that is internal or if the Canes will have to outsource a goalie will be the most important task this season. As James said, though, they're awfully close to the cap and need to get Svechnikov and Hamilton deals done.

The Canes aren't exactly in must-win mode yet and the core is still super young, but the decisions made now will matter the most when that time comes. These next two seasons are really going to show us what Waddell and the rest of the Hurricanes front office can (or can't) do. — Sara Civian



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Canes are back: 12 things that have me excited for the 2020-21 NHL season

By Sara Civian

Hurricanes hockey is coming back in less than a month.

While not having fans in the arena to start the season is a necessary stink and nothing is perfect, still.

Hurricanes hockey is coming back in less than a month. So many things about that sentence make me giddy.

In no particular order ...

1. The possibility of new rivalries. My favorite part of the first Zoom presser of the season was Jordan Staal's smirk when I asked for his initial thoughts on moving to a new division.

"I think it's interesting," he said. "Most of the teams we haven't played a ton. It's obviously weird we're going to play those same teams the whole year — I think it's going to maybe cause some quick rivalries and obviously some good games, but it is what it is."

Rod Brind'Amour agreed and called the Central Division a "breath of fresh air." We won't know all the specifics until the schedules drop (likely Wednesday, so maybe by the time you're reading this!). But we do know Carolina, Dallas, Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, Florida, Nashville and Tampa Bay will strictly play each other for 56 games.

I'm all hyped up trying to come up with the most random mini-rivalry possibilities. Forget Andrei Svechnikov vs. Alex Ovechkin. Give us Andrei Svechnikov vs. his older brother, Evgeny.

Better yet, did you know that the brothers Svechnikov fell in love with the lacrosse goal while watching Mikael Granlund score it against Russia, then Evgeny taught it to Andrei. Folks, stay with me: Pierre LeBrun is reporting that the Hurricanes have poked around on signing Granlund, and you'll remember Nashville's Filip Forsberg pulled off the move last season.

You're basically a pariah if you're in the Central Division and you can't wraparound, scoop and tuck. You're wearing sweatpants on Monday.

Everyone's waxing poetic about the all-Canadian division when we should really be talking about the all-Michigan division. I want to see a lacrosse-style goal rivalry.

I also want to see Lucas Wallmark vs. Everybody, considering he went from the Hurricanes to the Panthers to the Blackhawks. Maybe this was the common denominator that birthed the Central.

2. The regular season is finally the correct number of games. It took a pandemic and the fear of another lockout-esque situation, but the NHL is playing the perfect number of games in 2020-21, at 56. If the new division didn't already bring the hope of new rivalries, consider the fact that every single game counts. That's always true in theory, but there's something to be said about the mental jump from 56 to 82. There's no room for slow starts — or slow middles, or slow ends. We're going to see a new gear of intensity in the regular season. For all of the logistical headaches it's taken to give us an NHL season, the powers that be can pat themselves on the back for this one.

3. No exhibition games. I can see how no exhibition games might be a downside for some players who will have to jump right back into midseason form, but hey. No one this year will be suffering a season-ending injury in an exhibition game because Timmy from the ECHL wanted to prove himself. No shade to hypothetical Timmy or the ECHL as an entity, but I can't be the only one relieved about this. I also won't have to put "take this with a grain of salt ..." and/or "the preseason doesn't matter, but ..." in front of any tweets for the foreseeable future.

Take this with a grain of salt, but I think we won the preseason. Not that it matters.

4. Life after *NHL player* Justin Williams. Don't get me wrong, every last person associated with the Hurricanes is going to miss Williams as a player. But what's next for Williams as a person? You just know he's going to pop up somewhere. They say "this isn't a hockey town," but isn't it awesome that one of the most clutch NHL players of all time is now coaching his son along with the next generation of North Carolina-born hockey players. That's how you grow a "hockey town."

And what if I told you that Brind'Amour's son and Williams' daughter are on the same team, wearing No. 17 and No. 14, respectively.

Once you get over how adorable that is, I'd also think about the confidence some of the Hurricanes might get in the passing of the leadership torch, if you will. You knew Williams wasn't going away unless he trusted this group, and that brings us to ...

5. The trust the front office and coaching staff have in this group. There is one clear, overarching theme I've noticed in almost every interview with Brind'Amour since the end of the 2019-20 season: He believes in the Canes' current core and doesn't seem to want it to change. Generally, this type of thing is like when your mom compliments you and you're like "you have to say that, you're my mom." But I only bring it up because Brind'Amour talks about it so much unprompted that I know he really believes it. The latest was Monday, when he was asked about the benefits of going through last season's playoffs in a bubble.

"I think with this group, what we learned last year you want to make sure we take that experience playing with no fans," he said. "But (also) it didn't end the way we wanted it to end, and I think that's the fuel here, the fire, the 'We gotta be better than that.' That's what's great about having kind of that same group back — they suffered and went through that together. We want better things, and I think that's what you're going to see out of these guys."

I wonder if it reminds him of something ...

6. Martin Necas' potential. We're living in the golden age of everyone drafted by Ron Francis becoming the players Francis knew they would become. That's part of the reason Seattle scooped him up and why the upcoming expansion draft will be so dangerous for the Canes, but at least they're still reaping some of the benefits. I don't know about you, but when I look at Necas, I see the NHL player of the future. Versatile and slick, and sneaky on the power play.



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7. Socially distant Storm Surge. Obviously this isn't going to happen — especially with so many recurring opponents — but I'd love if the Storm Surge turned into a straight-up dunk on opponents on the road.

Like, "We understand there are literally zero fans here in the arena, but we're going to shoot someone out of Columbus' cannon because it's just sitting there, and when in Rome ..."

8. Talking to Teuvo Teravainen. This goes for everyone, to be honest. I've missed the humanizing interactions. But mostly Turbo.

I'll never forget Teravainen's genuine mix of surprise and happiness upon realizing that Brind'Amour did, in fact, say something nice about him.

9. The new broadcast team. I don't know why the Hurricanes' new broadcast team is the worst-kept secret of 2020, but I can tell you two things.

No. 1: It is Mike Maniscalco on play-by-play, Tripp Tracy on color, Abby Labar rinkside, Shane Willis in his reprising role as Shane Willis and hopefully the same broadcast crew that has handled every curveball with grace these days.

No. 2: This is an amazing group of people who truly care about each other, the Hurricanes and Canes fans. And she would kill me if she knew I was saying this, but you have no clue how talented Labar is yet — even if you like her. Labar's combination of pure talent, hard work and homegrown enthusiasm about the Canes is so rare. We also get to witness Maniscalco, whom we all know and love, living his childhood dream right before our eyes, and Tracy getting some room to be the brilliant Harvard graduate he is. I hope you open your

minds to the upcoming crew because I know it's going to be something special.

10. Haydn Fleury SZN. Every fan base has that one player it thinks could do better given a chance, and for the Hurricanes that has been Fleury. My own last straw with the misuse of Fleury was during 2019-20 training camp when he told me he thinks he's smiling too much and perhaps he should smile less. Hey, maybe it was the smiling less that finally did it, or maybe it was all of us screaming about how he deserves better for the entire 2019-20 season — but Fleury has been proving us right since that first career goal.

After that goal, I asked him why it finally happened and he half-joked that he saw my tweet from the previous day and couldn't keep going on like that. And so he didn't.

The only time I've wholeheartedly disagreed with a Brind'Amour decision is when the Canes were in the playoff race last season, experimenting with a seven-defenseman rotation, and he decided to play Fleury for one shift before benching him. I understand the hesitation during a playoff push, but I can tell you no one liked that rotation, and then Brind'Amour put Fleury in situations to succeed. Fleury ended up in a tie for most playoff goals among Hurricanes defensemen.

11. Not having an existential crisis every single day. Looking forward to focusing on anything other than "vaguely gestures toward the Earth" even if it's just every other day.

12. The Hurricanes possibly making the playoffs, then the world possibly being safe enough for fans to attend those playoffs. Enough said, but as one of y'all tweeted, they might want to hold off on building that new roof.

Hurricanes know the 2020-21 NHL season is 'gonna be different'

By Sara Civian

The NHL announced Sunday that the season is on — a 56-game regular-season slate starting Jan. 13, with a few other quirks. The return of the NHL in the state of the world means the concurrent return of everyone's favorite thing: Zoom news conferences.

Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell, coach Rod Brind'Amour and captain Jordan Staal joined local media Monday to catch up and give us some insight into the team as it quickly prepares for the season. Here's everything you need to know.

Getting up to speed quickly

The league announced its imminent return less than one month before puck drop, and teams will start training camp as early as Dec. 31. Carolina will start Jan. 3. There are still some details to hash out and protocols players have yet to learn, but the Hurricanes just seem relieved to have some hockey to play. Also, they're looking forward to seeing one another again.

They will still have challenges, such as no exhibition games, but won't need to get up to speed as quickly as teams that didn't qualify for last summer's playoff bubble.

Staal: I think it's going to be a big challenge, kind of like going into the bubble. It's going to be a quick training camp and I don't think there's any exhibition games. Then with the shortened season, every game is going to be that much more heightened. It's just going to be one of those things where everyone's got to be prepared right away and our group's gotta gel quickly, find a way to get hot early and stay hot. With a shortened season, you gotta string together some games if you want to make that push to the playoffs.

Brind'Amour: That's why (the players) work out in the offseason. That's why they train hard and have been — to be ready to go when we start. We don't have a normal training camp. It's very similar to after the pause, really. You're looking at now about eight practices that you're going to have then you're playing for real. It's not tiptoe in — the games count right from the start, and you can't have a bad start. It's pivotal to get going. ... I think with this group, what we learned last year you want to make sure we take that experience playing with no fans, but it didn't end the way we wanted it to end and I think that's the fuel here, the fire, the "We gotta be better than that." That's what's great about having kind of that same group back — they suffered and went through that together. We want better things, and I think that's what you're going to see out of these guys.

Staal: I'm not 100 percent on the rules of our day-to-day stuff that we're allowed to do throughout the season. I haven't really



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heard about it yet but I know there's going to be a few rules that are going to be challenging. I think our road trips won't be exactly the same as they were before in regards to restaurants and going out and stuff. But I think everyone just wants to play. We're happy we got a pending deal here and there's going to be some sacrifices. Everyone has made sacrifices at this time — these are small sacrifices for us to be able to play the game and hopefully entertain a group of people who are longing to watch some hockey. It's gonna be different, but in the end, being on the ice and being able to compete against the best players in the world is what we want, and I think it's what the fans want, too.

New friends

Among the many quirks of the season is the Hurricanes relocating to Quebec City — just kidding — to the new "Central Division." The Canes will strictly play the Blackhawks, the Blue Jackets, the Stars, the Red Wings, the Panthers, the Predators and the Lightning. Staal and Brind'Amour welcome the opportunity for new rivalries.

Staal: I think it's interesting. Most of the teams we haven't played a ton. It's obviously weird we're going to play those same teams the whole year. I think it's going to maybe cause some quick rivalries and obviously some good games, but it is what it is. We're happy we're getting going, we're happy we're playing hockey and we're excited to be back.

Brind'Amour: The coaches aren't out there banging heads all the time. The (players are) the ones that do it. When you have to do it over and over against the same team, that's where the rivalries really get cooked up, and like Jordo said, we haven't played those teams that much. It might be a little breath of fresh air for some of our guys to create kind of rivalries with some other teams, but at the end of the day, you heard it: The guys just want to play. It doesn't matter. They'll play anybody.

No fans at PNC Arena — to start

The Hurricanes will start the season without fans.

Obviously, no one wants to be living amidst a pandemic where these things have to happen, but there's a vaccine, which means some progress. I dare you to imagine the world starting

Andrei Svechnikov's ceiling, Jesper Fast's fit: Hurricanes predictions

By Sara Civian

After months of silence that grew more awkward by the second, there will be a 2020-21 NHL season. The NHL and NHLPA announced Sunday that there will be a regular-season schedule of 56 games beginning on Wednesday, Jan. 13. The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun reported an April 12 trade deadline, May 8 end of season, July 21 expansion draft, July 23-24 NHL draft and a July 28 start to free-agent frenzy.

We can finally focus on the actual hockey, and let's not waste another second. The Canes have a few big questions to answer this season.

Is the goaltending good enough?

The Hurricanes flirted with the idea of bringing in a new goaltender in the offseason, whether it was via the bumpin' free agency goalie market or one of the several trades that were on the table. They considered Marc-Andre Fleury before

to get back to normal just as the Canes qualify for the playoffs, then fans being able to return to PNC Arena for those playoff games. Did you get the chills?

Hang onto that hope for now while we get through the coming months.

Of course, playing with no fans presents serious revenue issues — especially in a small market. Waddell explained the thought process behind still playing and where money will come from.

"(Most revenue will come from) TV rights. Our TV contract is 56 games — 28 home and away," he said. "Then advertising — in-home facility dashboard and ice logos, our partners will probably be (the) second-biggest resource along with virtual advertisements on the ice and glass. Other than that, that's about it. Financially, we all know there are going to be big losses this year. We have a 50-50 split with the players. The escrow will just carry forward. There's not a one-year-and-done deal. The escrow that doesn't get paid back this year. It will just carry forward. It's more of a cashflow thing. ... We will be made whole at some point. It might take three or four years.

Though the financial pain will be difficult this year, Waddell stressed the importance of taking the ice to keep the NHL's brand alive.

"The other thing is I think is important is we need to play. To go out of sight for a whole year doesn't make a lot of sense," he said. "We are who we are, the NHL. Obviously we're not the NFL. I think we need to be in front of our fans, and our fans deserve that. I think you're looking at this thing hopefully with the vaccine coming. The hope is we're back at some kind of normality by the start of next year then we get back to where we were."

Any update on the Andrei Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton contract situations?

"Not really," Waddell said. And don't expect either to happen soon. There's too much going on right now, and to again quote Brind'Amour, "The guys just want to play."

the Golden Knights announced that they were keeping him and that they would find a way to be cap compliant. Darcy Kuemper of the Coyotes would have been a great fit for a trade IMHO, especially knowing the Hurricanes wouldn't have to give up too much to get him due to the Coyotes' financial situation.

But...

The Canes were clear all along they weren't going to overpay just for the sake of something new, the current rotation of Petr Mrazek and James Reimer was great at times last season, and it was rarely bad. And now that RFAs Warren Foegele and Haydn Fleury are signed, the Hurricanes barely have \$1 million in cap space. The decision to stand pat makes perfect sense. It's just that they're either in or approaching their Cup window, and you don't want to risk that sort of thing.



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The questions become: Is decent-to-above-average between the pipes good enough to win you a Cup? Is Reimer able to keep it up? Will Mrazek actually become the potential he has always shown in flashes? The way the front office — and Rod Brind'Amour — talk about how they're confident in this core and wanted to keep it together no matter what makes me feel like they truly believe in Mrazek, and Mrazek is someone to thrive off of that. This would be a fantastic year for him to find consistency, and I say he does it. I don't think the Hurricanes are going to win the Cup (Hey, I'm not ruling it out.) But I don't think his play will be problematic, and I think the Canes will look back on some of the contracts they were considering in the offseason happy they didn't go through with it.

Will the SAT line stick?

It's an extremely rare moment in which I'm asking you for the lines. Do we think Brind'Amour will keep Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen together?

For me, if they stick together, it's a sign the rest of the forward group is doing its job. I can't imagine a world where any of the above don't improve or at least remain consistent, but can everyone else keep it together well enough that the Canes don't need to spread out the scoring? (Looking at you, left wing depth chart.)

I just don't think that's going to happen. I think we'll see some interesting line combinations throughout the season and some depth scoring struggles, but I think come playoffs the SAT line will re-unite.

What is Andrei Svechnikov's ceiling?

My first instinct when posed with this question is always laughter. I mean, who could even begin to know this? I don't even think the kid knows it. But then I think about what Brind'Amour said after Svechnikov's first lacrosse goal.

"I think we're going to see more and more of what he's all about as he gets even better and understands the game a little more," Brind'Amour said. "The talent's always there, now the confidence is there. That's a huge thing for a young kid — to know you can actually make these plays and do these things. Once you put that in your back pocket, the sky's kind of the limit."

My prediction is he continues to be one of the most unpredictably awesome players in the NHL, whether it's another lacrosse goal, a between-the-legs he almost

accomplished last season or anything else you can think of. But I also think we'll see him become more of a Gordie Howe of the 919 area code with his underrated ability to drive to the net and set folks up.

In other words...

How will Jesper Fast fit in?

By all accounts, Fast seems like someone perfect for Brind'Amour's system. I keep saying not to expect the man to walk in and move mountains for the Hurricanes, but he's a solid on-ice replacement for Justin Williams. There's also comfort in knowing his penalty-kill prowess if Brett Pesce needs to shake off some rust upon his return to the lineup.

"There are a lot of good players in free agency, but we look more at what players can play the way we like to play," general manager Don Waddell emphasized when the Canes signed him. "Jesper was one of the guys we identified early."

I predict that he is exactly that, and that y'all might get frustrated when he doesn't score a million goals.

Does Jake Bean break into an NHL role?

Bean, drafted 13th in 2016, hasn't done anything explicitly wrong to make the Hurricanes regret their decision. He was the 2019-20 AHL defenseman of the year, scoring 48 points (10 goals, 38 assists) in 59 games with the Checkers (RIP). He led all AHL defensemen in scoring at 21 years old, obviously an impressive feat next to veterans of the league. The Hurricanes have indicated that he's improved on his play away from the puck and has worked on his strength — their two greatest concerns with his play. He has totaled 23 goals and 69 assists for 92 points in 129 regular-season games over his two AHL seasons. All that said, the now 22-year-old has only played two NHL games (8:07 TOI vs. Montreal and 8:48 vs. Anaheim last season). We know the Hurricanes' stacked roster is to blame, but will Bean ever earn an opportunity to prove himself at the NHL level?

My prediction is yes, but not necessarily with the Canes. Maybe he will get packaged in a trade, maybe it'll come via expansion draft, and as frustrating as having a basically NHL-ready player at the Hurricanes' disposal with nowhere to fit him, let's remember he's only 22. He still has plenty of time to establish himself in the NHL, it would just make sense on a team with more of a need for defense.

Free-agent fits? Goalie issues? The biggest questions facing all 31 NHL teams

By The Athletic NHL Staff

Let's drop the puck!

The NHL and NHL Players Association came to an agreement that will start a 56-game schedule on Jan. 13. The realigned divisions are expected to just play games against divisional opponents, with an all-Canada division making it so teams do not have to cross the border.

Training camps will open on Jan. 3, and the seven non-playoff teams can start on Dec. 31. More key dates and details of the agreement can be found here.

So now we turn our attention to the games, as The Athletic's NHL staff looks ahead to the biggest question each team is facing this season:

Anaheim Ducks: Which direction is this team headed?

The Ducks have been unwilling to commit to a real rebuild. Their general manager and coach believe they've got a team that isn't as bad as some may think, and the resistance to a teardown might be warranted when you've got several productive veterans, ace goalie John Gibson in his prime and the potential final years of longtime star Ryan Getzlaf. If their kids make a demonstrative leap forward and Gibson steals games again, maybe there is enough to make a playoff team.



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But if things go further south, a real housecleaning will be needed to get them out of the dreaded middle. -Eric Stephens

Arizona Coyotes: Can they recover from another calamitous offseason?

Yes, the reason is simple: Rick Tocchet. If there is one figure who can help the Coyotes focus on what is on the ice and not what is going on in the boardroom, it's Tocchet, who is entering the final year of his contract. It won't be easy after the embarrassment of drafting and then renouncing Mitchell Miller, trying unsuccessfully to trade captain Oliver Eckman-Larsson, and losing Taylor Hall to free agency. The Coyotes will be young and should have a chip on their collective shoulders, and that plays to Tocchet's strength as a motivator. -Scott Burnside

Boston Bruins: How will the left side of the defense hold up?

Torey Krug left for St. Louis. Zdeno Chara is unsigned. John Moore, Jeremy Lauzon, Jakub Zboril and Urho Vaakanainen (the left-shot defensemen in line for full-time play) combined for 48 NHL appearances in 2019-20. This could go off the rails. Matt Grzelcyk, formerly sheltered on the No. 3 duo, will begin 2020-21 on the No. 1 pair. After that, things get really thin. My prediction is that the Bruins accept left-side inexperience. Zboril and Lauzon fall in line behind Grzelcyk. Chara signs a budget extension. And the Bruins trust the right side — robust with Charlie McAvoy, Brandon Carlo and Connor Clifton — masks the deficiency. -Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres: Will the Sabres make the playoffs?

One more miss ties the NHL record with a full decade of futility. The infamy would be unbearable. The Sabres improved their offense with Taylor Hall, who will skate alongside Jack Eichel. They bolstered the middle with Eric Staal. Rasmus Dahlin and their youngsters are growing up. But they stood pat in goal, which will haunt them. Teams will need two dependable goalies to succeed during this condensed season, and it's not yet clear if Buffalo has one. -John Vogl

Calgary Flames: Is Jacob Markstrom the answer in goal?

Yes. The Flames invested \$36 million in free-agent goalie acquisition Jacob Markstrom in the hopes of, once and for all, solidifying a position that has been in flux since Miikka Kiprusoff's retirement. Markstrom was excellent for Vancouver last season, but most importantly, isn't subject to the same ups and downs that characterized the early part of his career. That increased consistency will make a world of difference for the Flames. -Eric Duhatschek

Carolina Hurricanes: Is the goaltending good enough to win a Cup?

The Hurricanes spent the first few weeks of free agency scoping out the robust goalie market, and they did explore some possibilities — including potential trades. But they were clear all along they weren't going to overpay just for the sake of something new when they aren't in serious trouble with their current rotation of Petr Mrazek and James Reimer. But the question becomes: Is "not being in serious trouble" between the pipes good enough to win you a Cup? This would be a fantastic year for Mrazek to find some consistency. I say he does it. -Sara Civian

Chicago Blackhawks: Can one of their unproven goalies emerge this season?

There's no secret to the Blackhawks' biggest question entering the season: goaltending. They had two legitimate No. 1 goalies a season ago in Corey Crawford and Robin Lehner. Now, both are gone, and they're being replaced by three relatively unproven goalies in Collin Delia, Kevin Lankinen and Malcolm Subban. Delia and Lankinen were the Blackhawks' top AHL goalies last season. Delia has played 18 NHL games, and Lankinen has played none. Subban has appeared in 66 NHL games, but he played just one minute and 10 seconds for the Blackhawks after being acquired as part of the Lehner trade. It's also worth noting the Blackhawks defense allowed the most shots per game last season. The Blackhawks are hoping their defense and at least one of those goalies will emerge this season. -Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche: Can they stay healthy?

The biggest question facing the Avalanche could also be if this is the year they will advance beyond the second round of the playoffs. But to answer that question affirmatively, they need their star players to have much better luck in the health department. In the 2019-20 regular season, the Avs lost 223 man-games to injury — with Mikko Rantanen (28 games missed), Philipp Grubauer (20), Gabriel Landeskog (16) and Cale Makar (13) leading the category — and the problem persisted in the playoffs.

Columbus Blue Jackets: How can they possibly score enough goals?

Only three teams scored fewer goals than the Blue Jackets (2.57 per game) last season, and none of them (Anaheim, Los Angeles and Detroit) came close to making the playoffs. Yes, the first year of life-after-Artemi Panarin felt like quite the hangover. The Blue Jackets traded right winger Josh Anderson to Montreal for center Max Domi, which, ideally, will give them two scoring lines. But they didn't make a major trade or free-agent signing to boost their offense, which, barring further moves, means their days as a club with very little margin for error will likely continue. -Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars: Can Anton Khudobin carry over his play in the crease from the playoffs?

The Stars are a defense-first, goalie-reliant team, and they're going to be without their true No. 1, Ben Bishop, until April as he rehabs from offseason knee surgery. Anton Khudobin played like a No. 1 during the 2020 playoffs but hasn't had to consistently handle the starting load in an extended stretch during the regular season for the Stars. With a rookie backing him up, the Stars will rely heavily on Khudobin to get them back into the postseason. -Saad Yousuf

Detroit Red Wings: Will they be able to find secondary scoring?

There's no shortage of questions for the league's reigning last-place team, but the biggest may be how the Red Wings can find some scoring beyond their top line of Dylan Larkin, Anthony Mantha and Tyler Bertuzzi. Detroit gave itself a chance this offseason by adding Bobby Ryan and Vladislav Namestnikov, but this answer will also hinge significantly on the progress of Filip Zadina in his first full NHL season. Those three and Robby Fabbri make up Detroit's likely pool for a



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second line, and should give the Red Wings much more firepower to work with if everyone stays healthy. It's still likely not going to be enough to score with the league's best, but those additions, combined with Zadina's development, should make Detroit much more competitive. -Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers: Is the goaltending duo of Mikko Koskinen and Mike Smith good enough for a playoff run?

Likely not. Mikko Koskinen's numbers last season were virtually identical to Jacob Markstrom's, whom the Oilers unsuccessfully pursued in free agency, but the overall offseason goal was to make the team better defensively — and that starts with the first line of defense: the netminding. The fact that they weren't able to get an upgrade there suggests another middle-of-the-pack defensive showing. Koskinen has shown flashes of excellence in the past, but the Oilers need that to happen more consistently to get to the next level. -Eric Duhatschek

Florida Panthers: Will Sergei Bobrovsky become the \$70 million goalie he is being paid to be?

Yes, there will be skeptics after the two-time Vezina Trophy winner faltered during the 2019-20 season. Of the 45 goalies who played in at least 30 games last season, Bobrovsky's .900 save percentage was 38th. But veteran goalies often struggle early in a new market. Coach Joel Quenneville should have a better handle on this team in his second season and new GM Bill Zito, who was with Bobrovsky in Columbus, has bolstered the Panthers lineup with quality two-way players and leaders who should bolster the team's play and, by extension, Bobrovsky's return to form. -Scott Burnside

Los Angeles Kings: Can Drew Doughty rise back to elite level status?

After two subpar seasons by his usual high standards, does Drew Doughty have enough left in the tank to vault back into the elite level of NHL defensemen? He could benefit by being paired with newcomer Olli Maatta or a now more experienced Tobias Bjornfot, who started this past season, briefly, in L.A. before getting sent to AHL Ontario. The Kings got the best from Doughty when he was instinctive, not reactive. And the short answer? Yes, he does have enough. -Lisa Dillman

Minnesota Wild: Who is the Wild's No. 1 center?

As of now, Marcus Johansson will likely fill the glaring hole. Not that he's not a good player, but Johansson was a much better winger than center with previous teams. If it's not Johansson, then who? Joel Eriksson Ek is a top defensive center, never scoring more than last year's career-high (eight goals, 29 points). Nick Bjugstad is coming off back surgery and has been a better winger at the NHL level. Nick Bonino isn't a first-line center, nor is rookie Nico Sturm and oft-scratched Victor Rask. First-round pick Marco Rossi is 19 and there's no guarantee he'll earn a full-time roster spot when the Wild could always return him to Zurich without burning the first year of his contract. The Wild are going with a "center by committee" approach, as of now, which in reality means they're light at that spot. -Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens: Can Nick Suzuki and Jesperi Kotkaniemi immediately meet expectations?

So much of what the Canadiens hope to do this season is based on this question. GM Marc Bergevin went out and acquired wingers Josh Anderson and Tyler Toffoli to help ensure this process runs smoothly, where Nick Suzuki and Jesperi Kotkaniemi pick up where they left off in the bubble, where they become impact players sooner than expected. There is no real safety net here. Bergevin is banking on two centers barely in their 20s to carry a lot of the offensive load for this team, and there will assuredly be speed bumps for each of them. Just how bumpy that road is for each of them will go a long way in determining how competitive the Canadiens are this season. -Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators: Can the core group rebound from a down season?

GM David Poile did not completely clean house after a disappointing postseason, but several veteran players — Nick Bonino, Mikael Granlund, Craig Smith, Kyle Turris and Austin Watson — were not retained. That puts pressure squarely on the core group, led by Norris Trophy-winning captain Roman Josi. Poile is banking on the Predators' top forwards — Viktor Arvidsson, Matt Duchene, Filip Forsberg and Ryan Johansen — to rebound from down years and point the team back in the right direction. If the Predators continue to trend downward, then franchise-altering decisions could be made in the near future. -Adam Vingan

New Jersey Devils: What happens with the pending UFAs?

The biggest long-term question for the Devils is whether or not Nico Hischier and Jack Hughes will become world-class players capable of fronting a potential champion, but the most important planning point for the next couple of seasons is what happens with Kyle Palmieri, Nikita Gusev and Travis Zajac? They are all unrestricted free agents after the 2020-21 season. Zajac has a full no-trade clause, but could the Devils move Palmieri or Gusev before the deadline if they haven't agreed to a new contract? -Corey Masisak

New York Islanders: Can they duplicate their 2020 playoff success?

They're going to have to do it with essentially the same roster, minus Devon Toews — one of their better defensemen last season. GM Lou Lamoriello had to dump Toews for cap reasons, and he still needs to sign RFA Mathew Barzal and a few veterans with precious little cap space. Then the challenge for coach Barry Trotz is to get his veteran team up and running as quickly as they did this summer when they surprised the NHL by getting within two wins of the Stanley Cup Final. Hard to bet against Lamoriello and Trotz, but this team still doesn't have the same high-end skill as its closest competitors. -Arthur Staple

New York Rangers: Where do the young players slot in the lineup?

This clearly being a cap-crunched rebuilding season in the post-Henrik Lundqvist (and Marc Staal and Jesper Fast) era, the main question for the Rangers is where their young top prospects play. Alexis Lafreniere is a left winger, with the Rangers stacked at the position with Artemi Panarin and Chris Kreider. Kaapo Kakko could be the answer at right wing with Panarin and Ryan Strome, in Fast's place. But there is the chance that Kreider switches to the right, Lafreniere plays in



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the top six on the left, and Pavel Buchnevich switches from the right of Kreider and Mika Zibanejad to Fast's spot. Or three first-rounders form a youthful third line: Lafreniere, 19; center Filip Chytil, 21; and Kakko, 19. -Rick Carpinello

Ottawa Senators: What is best for the prospects?

This is arguably the biggest consideration for the Senators this season given the importance of youth in the organization — and it has some layers to it. Do the Senators want to bring Tim Stuetzle to Canada for a shortened season to play against better teams in an All-Canada Division every night? Should Erik Brannstrom play in the NHL consistently against Auston Matthews and Connor McDavid when he struggled last season? Do they really want to rush anyone under such circumstances, especially after some players haven't played since March? The schedule and travel could also be tough on a team full of young players, and you don't want to negatively impact development for a strange and shortened season. -Hailey Salvian

Philadelphia Flyers: Can they replace Matt Niskanen on the top pair?

Flyers GM Chuck Fletcher had it all planned out. Matt Niskanen would provide two years worth of stability on the top pair to aid in the development of Ivan Provorov, and give his other young defensemen — Travis Sanheim and Philippe Myers, in particular — an extra couple years to naturally grow into big-minute roles. Now, in the wake of Niskanen's surprise retirement, that plan is in shambles. All of Sanheim, Myers, and even rebound candidates Shayne Gostisbehere and Erik Gustafsson have the talent to thrive in top-pair duties. But if no one steps up, it's a glaring hole for a team with darkhorse Stanley Cup aspirations. -Charlie O'Connor

Pittsburgh Penguins: Is Tristan Jarry the real deal?

The Penguins remain loaded at forward, particularly in the top-six. They're also pretty good on the blue line, and the respective departures of Justin Schultz and Jack Johnson should be addition by subtraction. Still, enormous pressure falls on Tristan Jarry. He made the NHL All-Star Game last season and it was deserved. But he's the guy now, as Matt Murray has moved on. Jarry must prove he can carry the load for the Penguins and that he can be durable in what figures to be a very hectic season in terms of scheduling. -Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks: Will Erik Karlsson return to form?

Everything was going great for Erik Karlsson midway through 2018-19, when he looked like his old dominant self for about a six-week stretch in December/January. Then he hurt his groin and hasn't been the same since. GM Doug Wilson has said that Karlsson will be as healthy as he's ever been with the Sharks when next season begins. We'll see. Karlsson has suffered some major injuries in the course of his career. If the Sharks have any chance at a rebound season, they'll almost certainly need Karlsson to be in the Norris Trophy discussion. Now that he's 30 years old, consider me skeptical that will happen. -Kevin Kurz

St. Louis Blues: Can Torey Krug replace Alex Pietrangelo?

Many expected the contract stalemate between the Blues and captain Alex Pietrangelo to come down to the wire, and that's exactly what happened. But what wasn't expected was the

club's signing of free agent Torey Krug as Plan B. The loss of Pietrangelo will certainly have an impact, but Krug, who is one of the league's top point-producing defensemen in recent years, is going to fit in just fine with the Blues. -Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning: Is Steven Stamkos healthy?

Solving the cap crunch remains an issue they must figure out by opening night, but the Lightning's main concern is the health of captain Steven Stamkos. Stamkos has played 2 minutes, 47 seconds of game action since February. That might have been some of the most impactful three minutes ever played considering Stamkos' inspirational return and goal in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup Final. But, in that game, Stamkos re-aggravated the core injury that sidelined him from early March until late September. A second surgery was done in October, with Stamkos expected to be ready for the start of camp, according to GM Julien BriseBois. There's been no indication Stamkos has suffered a setback, with the 30-year-old seen on social media skating at informal workouts this past month. But until Stamkos goes through camp and shows he's ready for the season, all eyes will be on the face of the franchise. -Joe Smith

Toronto Maple Leafs: Will management's dramatic overhaul pay off?

The Leafs have veered from a young-ish team almost entirely dependent on skill to one that attempts to account for some intangibles like competitiveness and grit with the signings of Wayne Simmonds and Zach Bogosian. That shift may get some of the headlines, but the reality is there was no more important change than the one atop the defense. If T.J. Brodie really can be the partner Morgan Rielly has long needed, the Leafs should improve. The minutes Brodie will grab next season went to some combination of Cody Ceci and Tyson Barrie last season. Not only that, but the bottom of the defense figures to be more stout with Bogosian and KHL defenseman of the year Mikko Lehtonen. It's possible that Travis Dermott enters camp as the No. 7 option. The only thing the Leafs didn't do was upgrade in goal. That could come back to haunt them if Frederik Andersen delivers another uneven season and/or playoff performance. -Jonas Siegel

Vancouver Canucks: Can this young roster take another step forward?

The Canucks will be in tough to improve on their dream 2019-20 campaign. This iteration of the club is worse in net, shallower and significantly less expensive. Vancouver upgraded the top-four of its defense and the club's best players are under the age of 25, so internal improvement should be expected. Still, this Canucks side is carrying a ton of risk, and will require good health and fortune to take another step forward. -Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights: How will their young centers perform?

While Vegas bolstered its blue line substantially this offseason by acquiring Alex Pietrangelo, it had to ship out veteran centerman Paul Stastny to clear out cap space to do so. The Golden Knights will now be relying on Chandler Stephenson and Cody Glass to fill that void. Can William Karlsson regain the form of a top-line center? Can Stephenson or Glass play higher in the lineup and produce? I think strong play from



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wingers Mark Stone, Max Pacioretty, Reilly Smith and Jonathan Marchessault will result in above-expected play from their unheralded group of centermen. -Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals: Who will emerge as the backup in net?

Braden Holtby is gone. Henrik Lundqvist announced he will not play this season. And Ilya Samsonov is coming off a serious injury that forced him to miss the restart. So who will be the Caps backup goaltender? Samsonov, 23, has No. 1 potential but still must prove himself. Vitek Vanecek and Pheonix Copley are likely to compete for the backup spot, and before signing Lundqvist, Washington management felt

Vanecek had earned his long-awaited opportunity. -Tarik El-Bashir

Winnipeg Jets: Can the defense hold?

Connor Hellebuyck and the Jets' star forwards give Winnipeg a fighting chance to make the playoffs. To get there, Winnipeg's defense will need to stop pucks — and then move them — worlds better than it did a year ago. Josh Morrissey should rebound, and Dylan DeMelo will help. Neal Pionk took a big step forward last season, and prospects like Ville Heinola and Dylan Samberg offer hope. Still, the Jets' defense looks an awful lot like the one that struggled last season. -Murat Ates

How to watch the Hurricanes' prospects at the world juniors

By Sara Civian

If you're a bored Hurricanes fan, the 2021 world juniors lineup panned out pretty well.

While the Canes aren't the Kings, who lead the NHL with nine prospects in the Dec. 25-Jan. 5 tournament, Carolina has four prospects representing three different countries this year. That means you'll have four countries to take an interest in if you so choose: Ryan Suzuki representing Canada, Vasily Ponomarev representing Russia, Noel Gunler and Zion Nybeck representing Sweden and the U.S. representing your potential bragging rights.

There are several time-honored traditions when it comes to this tournament, first and foremost being the stress of figuring out how to even watch it in the U.S. In some unbelievable holiday miracle, NHL Network is actually airing all of the world juniors games for the first time ever. And for the first time ever, some of us are remembering why we pay for NHL Network.

I recruited Elite Prospects' NHL Draft and Prospect expert J.D. Burke to give us a different perspective on the four Hurricanes prospects living out their childhood dreams. I always like getting Burke's perspective because he's extremely plugged in and gives credit where it's due without holding back on the bad stuff. Yesterday he ranked the Hurricanes' prospect pool No. 4 overall in a very fun read, and you can check out his and co-host Craig Button's recent, in-depth interview with Hurricanes director of player personnel, Darren Yorke.

Ryan Suzuki: Team Canada

I'll admit Suzuki is the Canes prospect I'm keeping the closest eye on during the tournament, partially due to how close he is to getting a crack at an NHL career (and his potential in that context), partially because of Scott Wheeler's piece. The Canes picked the now-19-year-old center 28th overall in the 2019 draft. His confidence immediately struck me when I asked him to scout himself and he said, "I like to be electric out there."

Same.

After a slow-ish start in the OHL (for him) and a gruesome eye injury detailed in Wheeler's piece, Suzuki was traded from the Barrie Colts to the Saginaw Spirit. He took off and ended up with 58 points (18 goals, 40 assists) in 44 games.

Burke's take: "Suzuki's development seemed to plateau a bit last season, but it's fair to wonder how much of that can be traced back to the major eye injury he suffered and has since remedied. Concerns about his work rate and game-to-game consistency linger among the scouting community, but he's doubtless one of the more creative rush distributors outside of the NHL. The problem is, he's so committed to being a playmaker that he often passes up Grade-A scoring chance opportunities himself. He's about an above-average NHL skater, and his puckhandling checks in at about that range, too. This tournament will offer a nice opportunity to see him in a post-eye injury context."

Now, it's well-known in the world of NHL prospects media that Burke isn't the biggest Suzuki fan out there, but I appreciate that even more since I and many of you are already sold on him. We now have a solid list of things to consider when we watch him play.

Vasily Ponomarev: Team Russia

Ponomarev, an 18-year-old center drafted 53rd overall in 2020, has registered nine points (5 goals, 4 assists) in nine games with the Shawinigan Cataractes of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League this season, after tallying 49 points (18 goals, 31 assists) in 57 games in 2019-20.

I've never hidden how unimpressed I am when people tear it up in the Q, so let's look at some highlights with conveniently funky background music.

Those highlights and many others make me believe in Ponomarev/Ponomarev (according to Elite Prospects, his last name could be spelled both ways in English) as someone who has mastered the zone transition and flow of the current game. It looks like he gets it, and Burke agrees so aggressively that he actually asked me if he could take a nap before giving me his full thoughts.

Burke's take: This kid's got one hell of a motor. His effort is never in question. As we saw at the World Junior A Challenge, he's pretty creative and gifted as a puckhandler when he's got some talent to play with, too. He's a playmaking two-way forward. Has a bit of a throwback skating stride; he recovers wide and is a bit top-heavy. That said, Ponomarev's activity rate is so high that it barely matters.

Sold.

Noel Gunler: Team Sweden



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I don't know about you, but every time I think about Noel Gunler, I think about everyone on Twitter saying "Of COURSE the Canes got him 41st overall."

The 19-year-old Swedish winger had 13 points (4 goals, 9 assists) in 45 games with the SHL's Lulea in 2019-20 — good for sixth among the SHL's rookies.

Being the genius that I am, I know that it's generally good to play in the SHL at a young age and that stats don't tell the whole story. So at the time I was confused on if the Twitter fodder was a good or bad thing:

I later found out it was both, and that's what makes it Canesy. High risk, high reward.

People had Gunler anywhere from Top 15 (bold) to early 30s, but not many had him still available at 41. So a phenomenon we need to start calling the Canes Occam's Razor happened, where they pick the best value player late in the game and everyone's like "OF COURSE!"

I picture general manager Don Waddell (always been good at drafting, FWIW), Yorke and vice president of hockey management and strategy Eric Tulsy staring at the camera like Jim Halpert. Then I picture owner Tom Dundon running up and down the hallway in a tracksuit just elated it wasn't a defenseman.

Anyways, the Canes recently hired former Dobber Prospects head of European scouting Jokke Nevalainen as an amateur scout. He wrote about Gunler ahead of the draft (and ahead of his hiring): "Gunler has an incredible ability to score goals in different ways because of his elite release and ability to shoot the puck. It doesn't matter if it's a wrist shot, a snap shot or a one-time slap shot, Gunler's shots are hard and accurate, and he doesn't need much time or space to get them off his blade."

Burke's take: "You'll be hard-pressed to find any two scouts who think similarly of Noel Gunler. He's a bit of an enigma that way. Depending on who one asks, he's either a surefire bet to play top-six minutes in the NHL or a lost cause destined for a productive career in Europe, with very little happening in-between. If pressed, I would lean towards the former camp. Gunler's got a wicked shot. It's the most consistent component of his game. Even when his work rate wanes, which is often, that shot is there as an ever-present threat that demands the opposition's attention. He's shy of contact with the puck on his stick, and often makes panicked plays as a result. He's all over the place defensively, alternating between launching himself at opponents in a straight-line or just wandering aimlessly — neither method is especially effective. His skating needs work, particularly his stride recovery. His off-of-the-puck instincts are excellent, when he's fully engaged, but that's not nearly often enough. Noel Gunler's game: It's a land of contrasts."

In conclusion: The Absolute Canes

Zion Nybeck: Team Sweden

As discussed above, I know the Hurricanes' prospect brains are among the best in the league. But nothing will convince me they didn't at least joke about Zion Williamson while selecting 18-year-old left-wing Zion Nybeck 115th overall in the 2020 draft. Will a 5-foot-8, 18-year-old stroll into Raleigh and land a shoe deal with Nike? No. But at least that shoe

won't explode mid-game — there go the Canes, crushing it with their big brains once again. How do they do it?!

The cool thing about Nybeck is his prior performance on the world stage: He recorded five points (2 goals, 3 assists) in seven games at the 2019 Under-18 World Championship — the one where Sweden won the gold medal.

Burke's take: "There are some really interesting qualities to Nybeck's game. He's an excellent distributor, with a great sense of patience and timing with the puck on his stick. The problem is, that patience sometimes turns to passivity, and that lack of pace stands as a major hurdle en route to the NHL. Likewise, his skating just isn't good enough for a player his size. There aren't many 5-foot-8 playmakers with average skating strides playing NHL minutes on the wing, and I'm not especially sold on Nybeck's ability to buck the trend."

Here are all the games you'll want to watch that will feature Hurricanes prospects in Eastern time:

Sunday, December 20 — Exhibition Play

6 p.m. — Team USA vs. Switzerland

Monday, December 21 — Exhibition Play

6 p.m. — Sweden vs. Canada

9:30 p.m. — Russia vs. Slovakia

Tuesday, December 22 — Exhibition Play

6 p.m. — Finland vs. Team USA

9:30 p.m. — Switzerland vs. Sweden

Wednesday, December 23 — Exhibition Play

6 p.m. — Canada vs. Russia

Friday, December 25

9:30 p.m. — Russia vs. Team USA

Saturday, December 26

2 p.m. — Sweden vs. Czech Republic

6 p.m. — Germany vs. Canada

9:30 p.m. — Team USA vs. Austria

Sunday, December 27

6 p.m. — Slovakia vs. Canada

9:30 p.m. — Czech Republic vs. Russia

Monday, December 28

6 p.m. — Austria vs. Sweden

Tuesday, December 29

2 p.m. — Team USA vs. Czech Republic

6 p.m. — Canada vs. Switzerland

9:30 p.m. — Austria vs. Russia

Wednesday, December 30

9:30 p.m. — Russia vs. Sweden

Thursday, December 31

6 p.m. — Canada vs. Finland

9:30 p.m. — Sweden vs. Team USA

Saturday, January 2



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Noon — Quarterfinal: TBD
3:30 p.m. — Quarterfinal: TBD
7 p.m. — Quarterfinal: TBD
10:30 p.m. — Quarterfinal: TBD

Monday, January 4

6 p.m. — Semifinal: TBD
9:30 p.m. — Semifinal: TB

Tuesday, January 5

5:30 p.m. — Bronze Medal Game: TBD
9:30 p.m. — Gold Medal Game: TBD

How the Hurricanes could stack up in their revamped division in 2021

By Sara Civian

We've reached the era of disclaimers in the 2020-21 (or shall we call it the 2021?) NHL offseason. Perhaps this is a misnomer, because this is a time much preferable to the previous two eras: the "waiting for anything at all to happen" era, and then "the starting to worry that the NHL might never play again" era.

The latest update, per The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun:

The era of disclaimers is like when you were a kid and your parents finally agreed to get you a puppy.

Parent: "Daughter/son, we have finally agreed to get a pupp—"

You, already crying: "PUPPY!"

Parent: "You will be the one feeding this puppy. You will be the one taking the puppy on walks."

You, sobbing on the floor: "PUPPY!"

Parent: "Your responsibility. But yes, puppy."

Right now LeBrun is basically the older sibling telling us that mom and dad bought a puppy and it will be here Jan. 13. He's reporting that the NHL and NHLPA are making progress in their preparation for the 2020-21 season. I can't blame you if you've already started sobbing on the floor, but we need to talk about a few things once you've calmed down.

Disclaimer No. 1, which LeBrun continues to stress in his reporting: The rising COVID-19 cases in North America could throw a wrench in these plans — nothing is 100 percent official yet.

Disclaimer No. 2, again from LeBrun: "There's still sizable work to be done on scheduling, (COVID-19) protocols, critical dates, etc."

No. 3: Critical dates are still being discussed.

But the two most important things seem to be decided: The target start date is Jan. 13, and it will be a 56-game season. Now come the possibilities, which range from highly likely to still spitballing.

It is highly likely that the Hurricanes will not be included in their usual "Metro(ish)" Division." Per LeBrun, the latest iteration of the NHL's plan has the Hurricanes in a division with Columbus, Detroit, Chicago, Florida, Minnesota, Nashville and Tampa Bay. I immediately thought of Rod Brind'Amour calling last season's Metro Division one of the hardest to play in of the last 20 years when the Hurricanes were fighting for a playoff spot.

You never want to write off any NHL opponent as easy — remember Detroit sweeping Montreal last season? — but let's

be real. If nothing changes and the Hurricanes are in this new "Central(ish)" Division, they objectively improve their chances of making a third consecutive playoff appearance.

The Hurricanes struggled in-division last season, even when it barely made sense (0-4-0 against the Rangers, 1-1-0 split with the Devils, 0-2-1 against the Blue Jackets). How do their new neighbors stack up?

Columbus Blue Jackets

Canes vs. CBJ since 2018-19: 2-4-1

Unfortunately for the Hurricanes, they're bringing along that old foe they couldn't beat last season.

The defensively sound Blue Jackets added Max Domi for some scoring flare. The Blue Jackets and the Canes are modeled alike when you really think about it, so maybe the familiarity and some defense-first, low-scoring heaters will spark a mini-rivalry for two teams in the playoff race. And hey, maybe the cannon was the problem all along — will that still be a thing this season?

Verdict: At least they're not the Rangers

Detroit Red Wings

Canes vs. Wings since 2018-19: 4-1-1

Last season ended in Detroit, with Brind'Amour slightly annoyed that the Hurricanes entertained Detroit's fights because the Canes actually had something to lose in playoff positioning. That's just about where the Red Wings are as a team right now. I fully expect Steve Yzerman to turn the franchise around, and I loved basically everything he did in the offseason. Come to think of it, the additions of Troy Stecher and Bobby Ryan make the team immediately more dangerous — and we can't forget Thomas Greiss would win the Vezina every year if he was just tasked with playing the Hurricanes. So I wouldn't write off the Red Wings so quickly — they've improved a lot this offseason. But the only place to go was up.

Verdict: Not going to be the joke you might think they're going to be, but still sort of funny

Chicago Blackhawks

Canes vs. Blackhawks since 2018-19: 4-0-0

The Blackhawks' situation is like the exact inverse of the Red Wings' situation. Holy surprise rebuild, Batman. It can't get much worse than a headline that says: "Blackhawks' latest moves shock, upset core vets like Jonathan Toews: 'It's sad.'"

It'll be interesting to see if that core group will use that as more motivation and try to rebel against the system, but a surprisingly decent team got surprisingly worse. There's only



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so much an aging core can do about those cards stacked against them. Also, uhh, who is the starting goalie?

Verdict: Bring it on

Florida Panthers

Canes vs. Panthers since 2018-19: 5-1-0

For whatever reason, the Hurricanes and the Panthers have had some super dramatic games these past few seasons that have proved turning points in Carolina's seasons.

The Panthers lost two significant scorers in Mike Hoffman and Evgenii Dadanov. For reference, Hoffman led the Panthers with 29 goals last season. He and Dadonov tied for the team lead with 11 power-play goals. Patric Hornqvist, who they added this offseason, shows up in the big moments, but you have to wonder if that's enough to replace two of their most productive players. On top of that, will Sergei Bobrovsky have any semblance of a comeback season? There's too much uncertainty going around to believe the Panthers will have a good season.

Verdict: At least they'll be the second-best Florida-based team in the division

Minnesota Wild

Canes vs. Wild since 2018-19: 4-0-0

The original plan had the Blues in this division and the Wild in the West, so the Canes can chalk this up as a win no matter what.

It's hard to imagine a future where I don't mentally associate the Wild franchise with a gigantic shrug, but once you look past their memeable recent history, they're actually turning into a solid team with a fantastic blue line and highly touted prospect Kirill Kaprizov signed. Cam Talbot in net could pull it all together for the Wild, after his bounce-back season with the Flames. I wouldn't sleep on this team, but again, the Canes would rather play them than the Blues any day of the week.

Verdict: *Less gigantic shrug than usual*

Nashville Predators

Canes. vs. Preds since 2018-19: 3-1-0

The Predators are sitting on tons of cap space, so you can't rule out the possibility of more moves before the season starts. That said, take a gander at their depth chart. It's not bad, but they did a lot of roster overhauling and not much building back up. There's a real lack of depth scoring and from the outside, it looks like they're still deciding if they should start a rebuild or spend a few more seasons pursuing a Cup.

Colleague Adam Vingan describes this as "a prove-it year for the entire organization," so add the Predators to the list of middling-but-potential-playoff-teams in this division.

Verdict: "I like it, I (don't) love it, I want some more lacrosse goals"

Tampa Bay Lightning

Canes vs. Lightning since 2018-19: 2-4-0

The only positives I can think of:

1. The Lightning will keep the Hurricanes sharp for the playoffs.
2. Canes-killer Tyler Johnson, who has averaged a goal per game against the Canes since 2018-19, might not be on the team.

Depending on how the playoff format pans out, the Canes will probably end up having to play the reigning champs early on. That's the biggest potential con about playing in this division, but Brind'Amour shrugged off this kind of thing when the Canes had to play the Caps in the first round with a "we'd have to see them eventually" mentality. The Lightning obviously have some cap issues to hammer out, so I'd suggest this read by Joe Smith to meet potential replacements for players they either have moved or will have to move.

The Lightning were built to last even if they have to swap some players in and out. They should pose as the Hurricanes' biggest threat on the way to the 2021 Cup.

Verdict: To be the best you have to beat the best



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NSJ 2020 Player of the Year: David Ayres parlays miracle on ice into fight against kidney disease

In a year unlike any other, the 40-something emergency goalie had the feel-good story of 2020 — and followed it up with lessons in humanity from which we can all learn

By Cory Lavalette

Sports, like life, is often about opportunity. If Drew Bledsoe had never been injured, Tom Brady may have not taken over as Patriots quarterback and led New England to six Super Bowls.

And if Carolina Hurricanes goalies James Reimer and Petr Mrazek had not both gotten hurt on Feb. 22 in Toronto in the same year a pandemic washed away countless games and events, David Ayres wouldn't be where he is today — everyman-turned-hero, dutiful philanthropist and North State Journal's Player of the Year for 2020.

The Toronto-based emergency goalie stopped 8 of 10 shots in 28:41 to help the Hurricanes to a 6-3 win — stats on their own that don't seem like best-of-the-year worthy but when coupled with his inspirational back story and charitable efforts afterward, make no one as worthy of the honor in this unconventional year.

"It's pretty special. ... That just gave me an incredible memory," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game.

What came after Ayres' performance was even more significant.

It would have been easy for Ayres, now 43, to use his new-found fame for short-term gain. Instead, the Whitby, Ontario-born building operator at Ricoh Coliseum — it was his work there that connected him to Toronto's AHL team and later earned him the opportunity to be one of the designated emergency backups for Maple Leafs home games — threw himself into fundraising for a cause close to his heart.

In 2004, Ayres was on dialysis and in need of a kidney, which his mother donated and set him back on a path to good health and a return to goaltending — a passion he shared with both his brother and late father.

With the blessing of his doctors, Ayres was eventually allowed to resume playing goal despite the fact that most transplanted kidneys, including Ayres', are placed in the front of the body below the waistline — a pretty prime spot to be hit by a puck.

His thankfulness for being able to return to a normal life made it easy for Ayres to decide to use his sudden celebrity to raise money for kidney research and donor organizations.

"I think that's the main thing, to be honest," Ayres said in late June after his story was named the Greatest Moment of the Season in a fan vote run by the NHL. "I've been doing a lot of work with the kidney foundation in the U.S. and in Canada and organ donation up here in general. So, for me, that's been huge. ... To be able to use the platform to reach out to everybody and help out, that's been amazing to me."

Ayres said one fundraiser in Canada raised more than \$90,000 in under three weeks — an example of the countless ways he has prolonged his supposed 15 minutes of fame to benefit others.

So while the stick he used in his NHL appearance is in the Hockey Hall of Fame and there's even talk of a movie based on his life, Ayres has guaranteed his impact will be much more than a half-hour in an NHL game.

"The night Ayres came to Raleigh to be recognized, sign autographs and sound the siren it was like walking around with a legendary Hall of Famer that had spent decades with us," said Jon Chase, the team's vice president of community outreach and executive director of the team's charitable wing, the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation. "Everyone wanted to say hello, say thank you and be part of the night. But what stood out the most were the individuals or families that had a connection to kidney transplants and donors — they wanted to share their story and thank Ayres for helping amplify the importance."

Chase said the work Ayres did locally raised more than \$10,000 for charities — part of the lasting gift from a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"Everyone's journey is special," Chase added, "but when you have a story like Ayres that catches the eyes of the entire sports nation and even beyond, him being a face of it just increases the message and amplifies the hard work many are doing. I believe the attention Ayres brought, the money he helped raise, not only made a difference but saved lives."

And above all, Ayres remains committed to the cause.

"If it wasn't for me having a kidney transplant and everything that the doctors and (others) do, I wouldn't have known to do it," Ayres said. "So anything charitable, I'm always open for. ... If I can do it and put a smile on anyone's face, then I'm happy with it."



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New divisions, guidelines await Hurricanes for 2020-21

Carolina will play in the new-look Central Division

By Cory Lavalette

The Carolina Hurricanes and the NHL will start the 2020-21 (2021?) season on Jan. 13. There are still plenty of unknowns on how the planned 56-game season in which teams will play eight times against the seven other teams in their newly formed divisions (the exception is the all-Canadian North Division, which has seven teams that will play eight games against one another) will unfold. But Hurricanes GM Don Waddell, coach Rod Brind'Amour and captain Jordan Staal did provide some answers in a Zoom call with the media Monday.

New divisions?

Yep, the NHL had to reconfigure its divisions to accommodate for the fact that travel in and out of Canada is extremely restricted. The end result? The aforementioned North Division will consist of the NHL's seven Canadian teams.

That means shuffling around all the teams, and the Hurricanes landed in the new-look Central. They are joined by both Stanley Cup Final teams from 2020, Tampa Bay and Dallas, fellow Metropolitan Division rival Columbus, the rebuilding Red Wings, former Southeast Division rival Florida, and Western Conference mainstays Chicago and Nashville.

"We haven't played those teams that much so I think it might be a little breath of fresh air for some of our guys to kind of create a little more rivalry with some other teams," Brind'Amour said. "But at the end of the day, the guys just want to play, so it doesn't matter."

Forget Uber and Lyft — we're talking taxis

Teams will be allowed a taxi squad of 4-6 players who will be paid AHL salaries. That means any player picked by a team to be designated to a taxi squad would be subject to waivers the same as if they were being assigned to the minors.

Another wrinkle: There will not be emergency goalies available in NHL arenas this season — sorry, David Ayres — so teams will be required to have a third goalie with them on road trips. That could be a third goalie on the NHL roster or a taxi squad goalie. Each team will be required to have a goalie on their taxi squad and they will hit the road with the team for away games. Other taxi squad members will not be required to travel with the NHL club.

So I'm stuck in the AHL ... forever?

NHL teams will be able to shuffle players from their AHL teams to the taxi squad, but the protocols will be strict.

"There's going to be a minimum of seven days quarantine with at least four negative tests before they can join," Waddell said of moving players onto the taxi squad from the minors.

So teams will have to choose wisely about who is on their taxi squad. Would a young player be better served playing full-time

in the AHL rather than simply practicing in Raleigh? It seems like an ideal job for journeyman players who aren't going to benefit from time in the minors. Offseason signings like defenseman Joakim Ryan or forwards Drew Shore and Jeremy Bracco could be a good fit for the taxi squad over players like the developing Joey Keane or Ryan Suzuki.

Where things will get interesting is with players like Jake Bean who are ready for an NHL job but maybe don't have a spot just yet. Carolina will need to decide what's best for each individual player.

If fans can't be indoors, how about outdoors?

The Hurricanes were supposed to hold an outdoor Stadium Series game at NC State's Carter-Finley Stadium on Feb. 20, 2021. So it's worth asking: When is a better time to hold an outdoor game than when you're not allowed to have any fans indoors?

As it turns out, probably in 2022. Waddell said he remains in touch with the league regarding Carolina's planned outdoor game, but there currently isn't any plan to hold it this season. The Hurricanes want the event to be an absolute show-stopper, and current North Carolina pandemic rules would limit seating at the nearly 60,000-seat stadium. The best bet is to wait and put on the event as planned with a packed stadium.

Buckets for sale

Revenue streams for teams are pretty dried up without the money from ticket sales, parking and concessions. So while the NHL isn't ready to go full NASCAR with their uniforms, the league is exploring putting small advertised decals on players helmets' — more like the NBA's tiny jersey ads rather than the company logos splashed all over European hockey teams' uniforms and rinks.

"We're exploring right now putting patches on helmets, both home and away," Waddell said. "I think would be a pretty big asset. ... That's something that has been talked about for years, but we got to a point to make that happen."

"100% ready to roll"

The Hurricanes had their share of injuries last season, from defenseman Dougie Hamilton being hurt before the pandemic derailed things and Brett Pesce missing the balance of the season after suffering a shoulder injury in February during the Ayres game in Toronto to Andrei Svechnikov going down in the playoff series with Boston.

But Waddell said his team is healthy ahead of its brief training camp.

"We're in good shape ... and I think we're 100% ready to roll," he said.

Who isn't?



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Gold: Forward thinking

By Adam Gold

On January 14, 2021 the Carolina Hurricanes will begin their latest quest for the Stanley Cup in Detroit against the Red Wings.

As long as Covid-19 doesn't interfere. Everything is virus-dependent, so stand by.

So, with 18 days before the season starts and two weeks before training camp opens, let's take some time and look at position groups to get a feel for where the Hurricanes stand heading into a 56-game slugfest of a regular season. And remember, Carolina lives in the Central Division this year.

Two quick notes before we dive into the forwards. First, it was a sad inevitability that the NHL would eventually postpone the outdoor game scheduled for this February at Carter-Finley Stadium. Without the assurance that the team could sell out the 50,000-plus seats -- and they would have, easily, under non-pandemic circumstances, there was no way to stage the game. You can't have an event of that magnitude without an atmosphere to match. Hopefully, we'll crank that up in the winter of 2022.

Next, is that Carolina has four players worth watching at the World Junior Hockey Championship in Edmonton. Oddly enough, none of them play for Finland, but there is last year's first round pick, Ryan Suzuki, who has fought through a serious eye injury to make Team Canada and remains one of the Canes best prospects. Ryan scored as Canada routed Germany, 16-2 in their opener. In addition, a pair of Swedes in forwards Noel Gunler and Zion Nybeck. Gunler scored a power play goal and Nybeck added an assist as the Three Crowns opened with a crushing 7-1 win over the Czech Republic.

The player to watch however, at least from a Canes fan's perspective, just may be Vasily Ponomarev. The second of Carolina's two 2nd round picks (12 spots after the Hurricanes took the aforementioned Gunler) was excellent, scoring twice, in Russia's 5-3 win over the United States. If you're keeping score, and why shouldn't we, that's four goals and an assist as each of Carolina's four prospects put their names on the scoresheet in Alberta.

Note: At publishing time, Suzuki and Ponomarev were getting set for their second games of the tournament.

Now, on with the show...

Eric Staal holds the Hurricanes record for goals in a single season with the 45 he posted during Carolina's cup-winning year in 2006. Through 68 games a year ago, Sebastian Aho had 38 and seemed headed towards the record-book when the season slammed shut. And, keep in mind that Aho scored just three times in the first dozen games.

He hit the rink running in the qualifying series against the Rangers with three goals and eight points in the 3-0 series sweep before being somewhat neutralized by Patrice Bergeron and the Bruins in the quarterfinal 4-1 loss to Boston. But, if four assists in five games is the low point for Aho, you get the point. He's this close to full-fledged stardom.

Prediction: 27 goals, 60 points

In his first season with the Hurricanes, in 2006, Cory Stillman tied Staal for the team lead with 55 assists. In that season, Stiller finished with 21 goals and 76 points. Oddly enough, that is exactly what Tuevo Teravainen posted two seasons ago as he established himself as one of the best set-up men in the NHL. Where Turbo differentiates himself from Stillman, however, is that he is arguably the best two-way player on the team.

Actually, it's not arguable. He is. Not that the following stat is the be all, but in the last two seasons, Teravainen is a plus-50 while not missing a game.

Prediction: 13 goals, 55 points

In sports we often throw around phrases like "there's no telling how good [this player] can be", or "the sky is the limit", or "the ceiling is the roof", a saying attributed to former Canes defenseman Michal Jordan. But, I honestly have no clue what the future holds for Andrei Svechnikov. He scored 20 goals as an 18-year old without one coming on the power play. He checked in with 24 last year AND added 37 assists to post 61 points. Throw in the seven goals in 15 career post season games and we are just scratching the surface with Andrei.

Oh, and the two lacrosse goals. TWO.

He plays a power game, has been rugged enough to not miss a single regular season start -- though there were the two playoff injuries when he found himself tangled up with, as they say, grown a\$\$ men. He also plays with some agitation and it's only a matter of time before hands are thrown, only this time, not with Ovechkin. The only question about Svechnikov is how high it goes from here. There's no telling, honestly. But, it will go higher.

Prediction: 25 goals, 62 points, 2 Gordie Howe hat tricks

Now, here's where it gets dicey for the Canes. I'm not necessarily assuming that the big three will stay together all season because the Hurricanes can't be great without scoring throughout the line up. Boston isn't great because Marchand-Bergeron-Pastrnak are great, though they undoubtedly are. Boston is great because -- or, more accurately, when -- they get offense from David Krejci and Jake DeBrusk and Charlie Coyle, etc...

For three seasons, Vincent Trochek averaged 26 goals and 60 points a year while a member of the Florida Panthers. He was a productive, two-way player who was used in all



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situations and was hard to play against because he was like the fly that bothers you at the park. THAT Vincent Trocheck can raise Carolina's offensive level to a place it hasn't been in more than a decade. We just haven't seen it yet in red and white (and black).

Yes, there were injuries to his lower body that have hampered him. Though he does seem fully recovered he hasn't yet seen his whole game come all the way back. Yes, it's hard to transition to a new team with an entirely new set of responsibilities and a new way of playing the game. Yes, there are new teammates and it takes time to adjust. But, the expectations with the Panthers were different than they are on Edwards Mill, specifically under his head coach, and when the stakes are higher it's often harder to produce.

You hate to put so much on one player. But, for me, Trocheck is simply the most pivotal player on Carolina's roster. Should Trocheck reclaim a 60-point game the Hurricanes are going to be really good. Here's a milestone to look forward to. His next playoff goal will be his first. He's played in 10 career postseason games.

Prediction: 14 goals, 35 points

Two years ago, the Hurricanes came to training camp and their pair of Eastern European teenagers were all the rage. It seemed as though Svechnikov and Martin Necas were everywhere. Well, they were. In fact, their pictures were plastered all over PNC Arena. The only problem was that after about two weeks, head coach Rod Brind'Amour realized Marty wasn't ready -- and he certainly wasn't ready to play center -- and the day after scoring his first NHL goal, in Tampa Bay, Necas was sent back to Charlotte where he would ultimately play the entire season, learning to play the wing in the process.

Last year, his 16 goals and 20 assists were pretty good for a rookie. In fact, if you figure on an 82 game slate, that would have been 19 goals and 24 assists, which were actually very comparable numbers to Svechnikov's first season. Now comes the encore. There were times last year when Necas looked like an NHL force. All that's missing is the strength and confidence to be that player on a consistent basis. The talent is not in question.

Prediction: 17 goals, 43 points

Brind'Amour hates it when we in the press ask him about forward lines. It's one of the things that amuses me about him, because we all know it matters, and we know he's gone through all sorts of different combinations. But, he hates that we obsess over it, even though he probably does as well. Barring a player move, and the break up of the SAT line, the best candidates to play with Vincent and Marty are Nino Niederreiter, Ryan Dzingel, free agent acquisition Jesper Fast and Warren Foegele.

Did you say Warren Foegele?

Yes, and here's why. Foegele has some scoring punch. He scored 28 goals in his rookie season in the American Hockey League. He piled up 13 goals and 26 points in the playoffs his final year in junior hockey. And, we know what he did to Washington in the first round two years ago. Foegele is betting on himself this year. That's why he's playing on a 1-

year contract and not a 2, or 3-year deal. But, in order to cash in he's going to have to play his game.

Here's the rub, Warren Foegele hockey isn't scoring goals. Warren Foegele hockey is 100 miles an hour on every shift, throwing 6'2" and 200 pounds around and wreaking havoc. When Foegele plays like that, the goals and the points will come. When we see Warren Foegele hockey, the Hurricanes usually play more to their identity.

Niederreiter and Dzingel have 25-goal pedigree, heck we saw that El Nino blow through Raleigh after the trade from Minnesota. But, both suffered from inconsistency last year. Each found themselves healthy extras at times and each could be teetering on the edge of living in press box village, and it's virtually a guarantee for one if Morgan Geekie has a strong camp.

Jesper Fast, who has spent his entire 7-year NHL career with the Rangers is a big, strong winger who impacts the game on both ends of the ice without necessarily posting big offensive numbers. He was pointing towards a 35-point season before the pause last year, so he's a checking forward who can still impact the offense. There's a reason Fast played the majority of last season on the same line with Artemi Panarin and Ryan Strome. While he's primarily played the right side, I wouldn't be surprised to see him used on the left with Trocheck and Necas if Rod thinks the physical presence would help create room on the second line.

Prediction; 10 goals 28 points

In his 15th season Jordan Staal is no longer a top-6 option. He's an elite face off man, penalty kill specialist and checking line center. Any offense the Canes get from their captain is almost gravy. Yes, as good as he is and as much as the head coach reveres his game and what he means to the team, there are just too many miles on Jordo to rely on him for more than 3rd line/specialty minutes. But, as long as he can stay healthy, the ice time will come in high-leverage situations because Rod has more trust in him than almost any player ever, not named Justin Williams.

Prediction: 7 goals, 23 points

Every great team has foot soldiers, players who provide energy, help kill penalties, ratchet up the physical game, provide team toughness, yadda yadda yadda. Between Jordan Martinook, Brock McGinn, Morgan Geekie, Warren Foegele -- assuming he isn't doing what makes him impactful -- and Clark Bishop (yes, even Clark Bishop) Carolina has several physical, versatile and reliable fourth line options at the head coach's disposal.

Geekie is particularly interesting in that it enables Martinook to slide to the wing and the rookie proved a capable option offensively. The kid even got some power play burn. He was very good against the Rangers, not so much against Boston, so it still seems that his exposure might be limited. Truth told, Geekie could really stand with another year in the American League, but we're not completely sure there'll be an AHL this year, so...

In all, it seems a very top-heavy line up unless two things transpire over the course of this 4-month sprint to the Central Division playoffs. Vincent Trocheck needs to be the best version of himself. If that comes to pass, I'd be stunned if



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Necas didn't make a big step forward and it might even have ignited either Niederreiter or Dzingel.

The other key is what type of attitude Foegele brings to the rink on a daily basis. The Canes wanted him on a 2-year deal, at least, and were hoping for something in the \$1.75 (AAV) million range. Foegele is thinking bigger for himself but the rub is that the more he tries to be an offensive player the lower his value is to Carolina. Warren needs to be the most relentless,

physical, in-your-face, forechecking demon he can be. When he does that, he's at his best. When he does that, the points will come naturally.

And, when he does that, he adds a dimension that defines what the Hurricanes are all about.

Next up: Defense

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.

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).



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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 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.



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Gold: Canes, NHL getting closer to a plan for the season

By Adam Gold

The National Basketball Association recently reached an agreement with the National Basketball Players Association on a start date and parameters to play the 2020-21 season. 72 games, starting on December 22, with the full, traditional, Christmas Day schedule that the league has come to dominate over the years.

Why bring this up in what is supposed to be a Hurricanes Notebook?

Well, when you consider how closely tied the NHL is to the NBA -- be it calendar-based, shared arenas, or what have you -- it's only a matter of time before commissioner Gary Bettman emerges from the shadows with hockey's plan of attack for the 2021 season.

Note: I used "2021" because we know there will not be a single game played before New Year's Day.

However, the National Hockey League's concerns venture miles past a start date and escrow and national television contracts. The League's issues only start after negotiating a start date and an economic structure with their own players association. We can wish all day long about January 1st and a 4-month season of (I'm guessing) 54 games. But, when you consider what Covid-19 is doing to virtually every nook and cranny of the United States -- and yes, its presence is growing in Canada as well -- the league still has to figure out a structure for the season, how they're going to handle travel, will they be able to cross the border (highly unlikely), and how to do all of this with limited -- if any -- fan attendance.

The NBA's Toronto Raptors are not going to play this season at their home arena in their home city. Why? Because their government won't allow visiting teams to cross the US-Canadian border without quarantining for about 2 weeks. So, much like Major League Baseball's Toronto Blue Jays, who used Buffalo, NY as a home field this summer, the Raptors are in search of a home away from home (likely Tampa Bay, Florida).

There are seven NHL teams in Canada (Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver), and I would expect that to act as one division that plays only against each other for four months. The rest of the league will be divided regionally, though there will be some pain in the elimination of some rivalries. Will the league try to convince the players that the only way to play this year is to select a bunch of hub cities and put everyone in a bubble? How can the clubs possibly afford to do anything close to this without fan-driven revenue?

The playoffs worked because the regular season was close enough to completion. Teams had all played 70 games, give or take a couple and the majority of the revenue had come in -- well, all except for post season tickets and concessions and parking and everything else that goes along with excited consumers spending disposable income. How is that going to play this year? Well, here's one man's opinion.

The NHL aligns geographically this year.

Canada (do I have to type them again?).

Northeast: Boston, New York Rangers, New York Islanders, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Columbus.

Atlantic: Washington, Carolina, Tampa Bay, Florida, Nashville, Detroit, Chicago, Minnesota.

Everyone else: Minnesota, Dallas, Colorado, Arizona, Los Angeles, Anaheim, San Jose, Vegas.

Is there a better way to group them? I guess you could move the Sabres, Blue Jackets and the two Pennsylvania clubs into a group with the Blues, Blackhawks, Red Wings and Predators, but now we're just nitpicking. To limit travel as much as possible let's just have everyone play entirely within those divisions and maybe, maybe, we'll get to the point where a significant enough number of fans will be permitted to attend. Maybe, by the time we get through four months of beating the hell out of the same 6 or 7 teams, we can load up on vaccines and host playoff games in front of half-filled arenas and create something that resembles playoff atmosphere.

Maybe.

What about hub cities? It worked in the playoffs, right? Yes, it did work. And, it was great because it allowed the Stanley Cup to be awarded and it lasted "only" about 10 weeks. But, it only lasted that long for two teams and they were buoyed by the lure of the Cup while other teams were shipped home as they were eliminated. Thinking about hub cities for a 4-month long regular season is insanity and virtually impossible.

Oh, and even though the commissioner is completely against expanding the playoffs, I will be surprised if we don't see it return for another year. Maybe they won't announce it initially, but if the league plays the season with minimal or no fan-presence -- something very much in play -- I'd wager it will come up in conversation. When you consider the amount of revenue that won't be coming in this season, one way to recoup at least some of those dollars is to put more playoff games on TV and (again) hopefully host fans just itching to buy another white Whalers jersey.

Of course, the virus is in charge, and nearly 200,000 Americans contracted Covid on Thursday, so none of the aforementioned may matter if we can't dig ourselves out of this hole. Stay tuned.

Don Waddell, the Canes President and General Manager talked last week about trying to reach agreements on contract extensions for Andrei Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton. Each has one year remaining on their current deals -- Svechnikov earning less than \$1 million on his rookie contract and Dougie will make \$5.75 million in the final year of his multi-year pact signed while he was in Calgary -- so there is no real urgency to do this now. However, both players are very much part of the future of the Hurricanes and all parties would like to have this taken care of before training camp begins, whenever that might be.

These are two very different situations, however. Hamilton is an unrestricted free agent after this season and will draw interest from around the league, especially if this year is anything like the first 50 games of last season. Honestly, that puts him in the \$8 million range on a 7(ish) year deal. I don't



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see the team doing that for anyone not named Aho or Svechnikov, so I expect the team to appeal to Hamilton's sense of comfort here in Raleigh to try and lower that number. A hometown discount, if you will, even though this is nothing resembling Dougie's hometown.

As for Svechnikov, use the Aho contract as a starting point. And, I'm not suggesting that it will be higher because the team would probably jump at a long-term deal in the \$8 million range. But, that isn't the best financial decision from Andrei's perspective. A bridge deal at a slightly lower number and then seeing where the market is two or three years from now makes sense. If Svech becomes the physical force he's trending towards, \$8 million will be a bargain.

The NHL is doing a series of "Reverse Retro" uniforms, allowing member clubs to throwback to yesteryear or just think outside the box. Well, you know what that means, right? Another Hartford Whalers uniform! I don't want to get into the pros and cons of why this is good or bad (I think it's great), but the Hurricanes are going with a grey Whalers sweater with the logo in blue and green on the front. It's great. What you think of the team trotting out Hartford gear is entirely up to you, and I'm here for your arguments. Yes, it's about money. In case you haven't been paying attention ALL of pro sports is about making money. It's a business.

Do you think the Golden State Warriors have a half dozen uniforms because they don't want to do laundry as often? C'mon!

My favorite one is Calgary's all black with a flaming horsehead. Choose your favorites from this ranking in The Athletic.

The Hurricanes opened up their new practice facility at the Wake Competition Center in Morrisville. With all due respect to Raleigh Center Ice, the club's previous home away from home, this is an enormous upgrade. Like when George and Weezey moved to that east side, deluxe apartment in the sky. Thanks to Mike Smith from the Hurricanes for this tour.

The team will have their own rink lined with a thousand bleacher seats, locker room facilities that mirror those at PNC Arena, an expanded weight room, a European-style sauna, a hot tub room, sports medicine center, oversized kitchen and a sprawling player lounge with mounted televisions and a ping pong table so Jaccob Slavin can take on all comers.

Players are already using the facilities on a regular basis. Hopefully, it will host a training camp in the next few weeks.



Carolina Hurricanes arena sustained damages after water leak

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The home of the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes sustained \$250,000 in damages after a water leak was discovered in the room where video replays are controlled for the overhead scoreboard, officials said.

Some team employees returned to PNC Arena in Raleigh earlier this month to find the leak in the CanesVision audio/visual control room and server room, The News & Observer of Raleigh reported Monday. The source of the leak hasn't been determined, officials said.

The scoreboard was not working for Saturday's Campbell-N.C. State men's basketball game, the first event inside the building since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That meant there were no video replays for the few people attending the game as well as coaches, players and media.

Centennial Authority executive director Jeff Merritt said in an email to authority members that the video board won't be fully operational until late January.

The authority's finance and its building and construction committees discussed the issue Monday, recommending that \$262,500 be approved for restoring the CanesVision system, including \$12,500 in fees for the authority's audio/visual consultant.

The authority has planned a full renovation of the CanesVision system that will cost \$3.3 million and could be completed in the summer of 2021.



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Breaking Down the 2020-21 Schedule

Highlights and trends in the 56-game schedule

by Michael Smith

With the beginning of the National Hockey League's 2020-21 season just three weeks away, it's time to get some dates on the calendar.

The Carolina Hurricanes' regular-season schedule has arrived - minus start times and broadcast information, for now - and it's a unique and quirky 56-game slate for what's likely to be a unique and quirky season ahead.

Let's break down some of the highlights and trends found within the 56-game schedule.

Two by Two

With the COVID-19 pandemic still raging in many parts of North America, the NHL is aiming to limit travel as much as possible. That's why the regular season and first two rounds of the playoffs feature intradivisional play exclusively. It's also why the Canes' schedule is, for the most part, grouped into pairs of games - two games against the same opponent in the same city.

Excluding four one-off games, the Canes will play 26 two-game series against their seven Central Division opponents.

Starting on the Road

The Canes begin the 2020-21 season with a four-game road swing through Detroit and Nashville. While the league opens on Wednesday, Jan. 13, the puck drops for the Canes on Thursday, Jan. 14 in Detroit.

Homecoming

After four games in six nights on the road to begin the season, the Canes return home for a six-game set against Florida, Tampa Bay and Dallas. The home opener - typically a tentpole event of the regular season - is set for Thursday, Jan. 21 against the Panthers, though the night will be more muted than in seasons past with no fans in attendance.

Challenging the Champs

The Canes face off with the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday, Jan. 26 in Raleigh, the first of eight meetings against the defending Stanley Cup champions. A rematch on Thursday, Jan. 28 rounds out that two-game set, and the Canes will then make their first trip to Tampa on Monday, Feb. 22.

Comforts of Home

The Canes will play eight straight games at PNC Arena from April 3-17, their longest homestand of the season. The Stars, Panthers, Red Wings and Predators will all come through Raleigh during that 15-day stretch.

The Canes' second longest homestand of the season is their first: six games in 11 days to end January, as they play host to the Panthers, Lightning and Stars.

Those two homestands account for exactly 50 percent of the Canes' PNC Arena schedule, which is rounded out by a four-game homestand, two three-game stints and two two-game pairs.

Hitting the Road

The Canes have two six-game road trips on their schedule. The first is a stretch of six games over 12 days from Feb. 2-13, as the team travels through Chicago, Columbus and Dallas to begin the month. The second is a tighter segment of six games in nine days in late April, as the team goes to Tampa, Florida and Dallas from April 19-27.

Heading West

The newly formed Central Division includes three teams from the Western Conference - the Chicago Blackhawks, Dallas Stars and Nashville Predators - meaning the Canes will play almost 43 percent of their schedule against teams they previously saw just twice a season.

The Canes will travel to Nashville on their first trip of the season (Jan. 18-19). They make their first voyage to the Windy City in early February (Feb. 2-4) followed a week later by their first visit to Dallas (Feb. 11-13).

Familiar Faces

The Columbus Blue Jackets join the Canes as the only representatives from the Metropolitan Division in the newly formed Central. The Canes face the Blue Jackets four games in a row (a home-and-home) from March 18-25.

Going Back to Back

The Canes play 10 sets of back-to-back games in the 2020-21 season, though with the unique construction of this schedule, every back-to-back features the same opponent either at home or on the road; there is no travel in between games, and the second game is simply a rematch of the first.

In fact, six of the Canes' eight games against Dallas are back-to-back sets: Jan. 30-31 and April 3-4 at home, and April 26-27 in Dallas.

The Canes finish the 2020-21 season with two back-to-backs: at home against Chicago (May 3-4) and on the road in Nashville (May 7-8).

Splits

It's no surprise that the 2020-21 schedule is tightly packed. April is the Canes' busiest month with 16 games on the docket. It's also one of the densest months, with those 16 games



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being played in a 29-day stretch, equaling one game for every 1.81 days on the calendar. A similar schedule density can be found in January, when the Canes begin the season with 10 games in 18 days. The Canes finish the season with a frantic five games in eight days in May.

Thursday is the busiest day of the week for the Canes, who play on every Thursday of the season except two (Feb. 18 and May 6). Monday is typically a lighter day on the schedule for

the Canes, but the team is slated to play nine games (two at home, seven on the road) on the first day of the traditional workweek this season.

Just two Friday games, one at home and one on the road, dot the schedule in February and May. In an interesting quirk, the Canes are not scheduled to play any Wednesday games this season.

Excitement for Season Fuels Canes at Informal Skates

Martinook: 'You're skating to prepare for a season now'

by Michael Smith

For over a month now, a group of players has been regularly skating and working out at the Carolina Hurricanes' new practice facility at Wake Competition Center.

With each passing week, that number grew with the hope of a season beginning anew.

On Sunday, plans were finalized for the 2020-21 season, a 56-game slate that will begin on Jan. 13.

That long-awaited news was an early holiday treat that provided a little extra boost in motivation and intensity on the ice, as familiar hockey sounds filled the red rink at WCC.

"With the mindset of the season being right around the corner, the competitive juices are flowing a little bit more," Jaccob Slavin said. "Guys are getting excited just to start playing again."

The Canes are now skating and working out with essentially a full complement of players. It's camp before camp.

"It's a lot easier to push yourself now knowing you actually have a time that you need to be ready for. Ever since I came back, though, the skates have been really good, and our pace is good," Jordan Martinook said. "It's definitely nice knowing you're not just skating to skate. You're skating to prepare for a season now."

"Workouts with Billy [Burniston] have been awesome, but with no start date in place, it was kind of, 'OK, do we need to push it to the next phase yet?'" Slavin said. "Now that we have a target date, we can get dialed in and get into season shape to make sure we're ready to go."

The Canes and the 23 other teams who participated in the league's Return to Play plan over the summer will formally open training camp on Sunday, Jan. 3.

The league drops the puck on a 56-game regular season just 10 days later.

It won't be completely unfamiliar territory for the Canes, who went from 0-60 in two weeks in July prior to games that really counted in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

This time around, the team figures to have around eight training camp practices on the calendar. In the absence of even just one exhibition game, battle drills and intrasquad scrimmages will have to serve as the best possible dress rehearsal substitute.

"Our training camp before the bubble was probably one of the best camps I've been a part of. Everybody was so upbeat. The energy was high, and the pace was awesome," Martinook said. "The first game in the bubble hit a lot of people by surprise because it was very intense, and you were going right into it. It will start very fast, I'm sure. Teams, us included, will want to start fast."

Starting fast is important each and every season. Teams will tell you they'd ideally like to be in a playoff position by Thanksgiving - it's a pretty reliable mathematical indicator of an eventual playoff berth, after all.

But, in a 56-game season that spans just about four months, there isn't ample runway to make up lost ground.

"Every game means that much more," Slavin said. "It's going to be intense. With no preseason games, we've got to be ready to go right away."

"It's going to be a big challenge," Jordan Staal said on a Zoom call. "Every game is going to be that much more heightened. Everyone has to be prepared right away. Our group has to jell quickly and find a way to get hot early and continue to stay hot."

The 2020-21 season is likely to resemble more of a sprint than the standard 82-game marathon. It will also be unique in the sense that the Canes will see seven opponents exclusively in the newly formed Central Division.

Put on pause are some of the rivalries developed within the Metropolitan Division over the last few seasons. Now, the Canes will square off against Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Detroit, Florida, Nashville and Tampa Bay eight times apiece, teams they posted a 10-7-1 record against in the shortened 2019-20 season.

"It will be fun. Games are going to get pretty intense pretty quick after you play a team 2-3 times in a short period of time," Slavin said. "I'm looking forward to it."

The Central Division features the defending Stanley Cup champions and the 2019-20 Western Conference champions. There are three Western Conference teams, a pair of old Southeast Division foes and a couple of teams in the midst of a rebuild. The top four teams in the division will qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs, which begin in mid-May.

"It's teams we haven't played a ton, so that will make it different," Staal said. "It's weird we're going to play those same teams the whole year, which I think is going to maybe cause some quick rivalries and good games."

And it all begins in three weeks.



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"I'm super excited. It's just going to be fun to get playing again. There's been a lot of time off," Slavin said. "We're all ready to get back on the ice."

Three weeks!

"Knowing in three weeks that we're going to be playing and getting going is super exciting," Martinook said. "Now it's about us going out and proving that we can be one of the top teams in our division and then take it into the playoffs."

What to Watch For in 2021 IIHF World Junior Championship

Four Canes prospects competing in annual tournament

by Michael Smith

The 2021 IIHF World Junior Championship begins on Christmas Day and culminates with medal games on Tuesday, Jan. 5.

The timing couldn't be more ideal, too. With the news that the National Hockey League will begin its 2020-21 season in mid-January, the World Juniors will serve as an eye-catching hockey appetizer before the main course arrives.

The Carolina Hurricanes have four prospects competing in this year's tournament, which will be held at Rogers Place in Edmonton without fans in attendance in a secure bubble similar to the NHL's 2020 postseason. All games will be broadcast live on NHL Network in the United States and TSN In Canada.

"The World Juniors is best on best," said Canes Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke. "This is a great experience and a great barometer of where these athletes are in comparison to their peers. It doesn't get too much better than these tournaments for these athletes."

Ryan Suzuki, Canada

Suzuki, the Canes' first-round selection (28th overall) from the 2019 NHL Draft, competed internationally most recently for Team Canada at the Under-18 World Championship in 2019, where he tallied a point (1a) in five games. The 19-year-old forward recorded 58 points (18g, 40a) in 44 games with Barrie and Saginaw of the OHL in the 2019-20 season.

Team Canada boasts a stacked forward lineup, Suzuki included, for the World Juniors, which will make competition stiff.

"For Ryan, it's a great opportunity to learn regardless of the situation he's in," Yorke said. "Being able to learn how to play, whether it's on the fourth line, first line or not in the lineup, all those experiences help further his development."

Suzuki will be aiming to grab the gold medal that eluded his big brother, Nick, in 2019.

"Any time an athlete has the opportunity to play at a level that is higher than their current club is a learning experience," Yorke said. "For Ryan, just going through training camp to push his abilities up to the next level - everything is faster and harder to play against - he's going to learn from that."

Vasiliy Ponomarev, Russia

Ponomarev, selected by the Canes in the second round (53rd overall) of the 2020 NHL Draft and signed to his three-year, entry-level contract a week later, has previous international experience and success with the Russian national team. He

led the team with eight points (4g, 4a) in six games and helped Russia capture gold at the 2017 World U-17 Hockey Challenge and also earned gold with Team Russia at the 2019 Hlinka Gretzky Cup with six points (2g, 4a) in five games.

"In the past when he's played at the international level, he's been thrown into more of a scoring role on the top line," Yorke said.

In the World Juniors, though, he might play a role more similar to that with Shawinigan of the QMJHL, where he posted 49 points (18g, 31a) in 57 games in the 2019-20 season.

"Given some of the older players, he may be used more in a defensive role. That's not something that's new to him, and I think he can shine in those situations," Yorke said. "Because of his hockey sense, his coaches can throw him into any position and any situation, and they're comfortable and trust him to get the job done."

Noel Gunler, Sweden

Gunler, selected in the second round (41st overall) in the 2020 NHL Draft, has already appeared in 18 games with Lulea and Brynas in the Swedish Hockey League and recorded six points (4g, 2a) this season.

Gunler, the third-ranked Canes prospect according to Elite Prospects, has the potential to be a breakout star in this tournament.

"They're going to need his offensive game to really shine through," Yorke said. "I think Noel is probably going to use the previous years when he might have thought he deserved to be there but couldn't make the team as motivation. I think this is going to be a coming out party for him."

Zion Nybeck, Sweden

Joining Gunler on Sweden's club is Nybeck, who was a fourth-round selection (115th overall) in the 2020 NHL Draft. Nybeck, 18, helped Sweden claim gold at the 2019 U-18 World Championship with five points (2g, 3a) in seven games.

"Because of his Swiss army knife capabilities, he could play anywhere in the lineup," Yorke said. "If they need him to play more of an offensive role, they could count on him for offense, whether it's power play or 5-on-5. Because of his competitiveness and tenacity, he could play down in the lineup and be able to bring some energy. Having Zion in this short tournament really is an advantage for Sweden because of the utility they'll be able to get out of him."

Preliminary Round Game Schedule

Preliminary round games of interest to Canes fans, in addition to Team USA's preliminary round slate, can be found below. The schedule will be regularly updated with game results.



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Elite Prospects: Canes' Prospect Pool Ranks 4th in NHL

Yorke: 'It's not an accident that successful organizations draft and develop well'

by Michael Smith

The latest offseason prospect rankings are in from Elite Prospects, and with a deep pool amassed through keen drafting, the Carolina Hurricanes rank fourth in the National Hockey League.

"It's a great message to our fans," said Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke. "They can feel proud that the pipeline is stocked. We're going to continue to try to find and develop the next tier of Hurricanes."

Elite Prospects praised the Canes for their 20 selections over the last two years of the NHL Draft and noted that "almost every single player has some combination of high-skill, high-scoring and high entertainment value."

In their analysis, Elite Prospects touted the Canes as having nearly unmatched prospect depth, especially with 14 young players they suggest have a "Future Value" of 5 or higher, indicative of confidence in a future NHL career.

"That depth ensures this Cup contender should have a steady stream of cost-effective skill to inject across the lineup for years to come," Elite Prospects wrote.

"Our scouting staff has worked extremely hard and has been diligent and able to deal with uncertainty very well," Yorke said. "This gives them a bit of notoriety, something they've earned given how hard and how well they've worked together."

Seth Jarvis, the team's 13th overall selection from the 2020 NHL Draft, tops the Canes' prospects rankings, according to Elite Prospects.

"Jarvis has everything needed to become a top-six forward, and he's not too far off either," they said.

Also on Elite Prospects' rankings are a couple of names that could graduate to the NHL in a full-time role in the upcoming season: Morgan Geekie, who made a splash with four points (3g, 1a) in his first two NHL games, and Jake Bean, who won the Eddie Shore Award as the AHL's Defenseman of the Year in 2019-20.

"It's not an accident that successful organizations, regardless of sport, draft and develop well," Yorke said. "For us to have sustained success, we need to continue that trend. It's not necessarily just the first- or second-round talents. It's finding the next Jacob Slavin or Brett Pesce, players who are able to have an impact well beyond the first or second round."

Prospect Rankings (per Elite Prospects)

1. Seth Jarvis
2. Morgan Geekie
3. Noel Gunler
4. Jack Drury
5. Joey Keane
6. Jake Bean
7. Ryan Suzuki
8. Patrik Puustola
9. Jesper Sellgren
10. Dominik Bokk
11. Jamieson Rees
12. David Cotton
13. Vasilii Ponomarev
14. Tuukka Tiekola
15. Anttoni Honka

Get to Know the Central Division

Breaking down the seven opponents the Canes will face in 2020-21

by Michael Smith

The entirety of the 56-game 2020-21 regular season in addition to the first two rounds of the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs will feature intradivisional play.

That is to say, the Carolina Hurricanes won't see any team from outside the newly formed Central Division until at least the third round of the postseason.

That's a long way off from now, so let's get to know each of the Canes' seven divisional opponents for the upcoming season.

"It's interesting. It's teams we haven't played a ton, so that will make it different," Jordan Staal said. "It's weird we're going to play those same teams the whole year, which I think is going to maybe cause some quick rivalries and good games."

Chicago Blackhawks

2019-20 record: 32-30-8, 72 points (.514 points %), 7th in Central Division

CAR vs. CHI in 2019-20: 2-0-0

2019-20 leading scorer: Patrick Kane, 84 points (33g, 51a) in 70 games

Key additions: Mattias Janmark (C), Lucas Wallmark (C), Nikita Zadorov (D)

Key subtractions: Corey Crawford (G), Olli Maatta (D), Brandon Saad (LW)

The Blackhawks are in the midst of a rebuild, as stated in a letter to their fans. Core veterans, like forwards Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane and defensemen Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook, will be leaned upon to groom their crop of young players.

The Canes and Blackhawks typically see each other just twice in a single season. Quadrupling that while Chicago



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proceeds through a rebuild should give Carolina an advantage in the head-to-head.

Columbus Blue Jackets

2019-20 record: 33-22-15, 81 points (.579 points %), 6th in Metropolitan Division

CAR vs. CBJ in 2019-20: 0-2-1

2019-20 leading scorer: Pierre-Luc Dubois, 49 points (18g, 31a) in 70 games

Key additions: Max Domi (C), Mikko Koivu (C)

Key subtractions: Josh Anderson (RW), Alexander Wennberg (C)

The Blue Jackets have qualified for the postseason in each of the last four years. In 2020, they rebounded from a heartbreaking Game 4 loss to shut out the Toronto Maple Leafs, 3-0, in the decisive Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Qualifiers. Columbus then fell in five games to Tampa Bay in the first round, the third time in the last four years that they've been bounced from the playoffs by the eventual Stanley Cup champions.

Rod Brind'Amour and John Tortorella tend to get the most out of the clubs they coach, and the result is, more often than not, a tightly contested battle between these two teams. Columbus is the lone Metropolitan Division opponent that joins the Canes in the Central.

Dallas Stars

2019-20 record: 37-24-8, 82 points (.594 points %), 3rd in Central Division

CAR vs. DAL in 2019-20: 0-2-0

2019-20 leading scorer: Tyler Seguin, 50 points (17g, 33a) in 69 games

Key additions: Mark Pysyk (D)

Key subtractions: Mattias Janmark (C), Corey Perry (RW)

Led by former Hurricane Anton Khudobin in net, who recorded 14 wins, a 2.69 goals-against average and a .917 save percentage in 25 postseason games, the Stars made a run to the Stanley Cup Final, losing to Tampa Bay in six games. Though the Stars' roster remained largely untouched in the offseason, they will begin the season without forward Tyler Seguin, who led the team in scoring in 2019-20, and goaltender Ben Bishop, both of whom could return in March.

The Stars still figure to be a tough opponent and will be looking to make another run at the Stanley Cup. The Canes, who dropped two 4-1 decisions to Dallas in the 2019-20 season, will have their hands full eight times against this club in the upcoming season.

Detroit Red Wings

2019-20 record: 17-49-5, 39 points (.275 points %), 8th in Atlantic Division

CAR vs. DET in 2019-20: 3-0-0

2019-20 leading scorer: Dylan Larkin, 53 points (19g, 34a) in 71 games

Key additions: Thomas Greiss (G), Jon Merrill (D), Vladislav Namestnikov (C), Bobby Ryan (RW), Marc Staal (D)

Key subtractions: Justin Abdelkader (LW), Brendan Perlini (LW), Trevor Daley (D), Jimmy Howard (G)

The Red Wings limped through the 2019-20 season, finishing with the worst points percentage (.275) of any team in the league's salary cap era. General Manager and former Red Wings great Steve Yzerman is leading the rebuild from the front office, while Jeff Blashill enters his sixth season as the team's bench boss, looking to break a four-year playoff drought with a retooled roster.

The Canes and Red Wings most notably met in the 2002 Stanley Cup Finals, as the Wings bested the Canes in five games to claim their 10th championship in franchise history. Now 18 years later, the Canes should have the upper hand in the divisional head-to-head tilts.

Florida Panthers

2019-20 record: 35-26-8, 78 points (.565 points %), 4th in Atlantic Division

CAR vs. FLA in 2019-20: 2-1-0

2019-20 leading scorer: Jonathan Huberdeau, 78 points (23g, 55a) in 69 games

Key additions: Anthony Duclair (LW), Patric Hornqvist (RW), Alexander Wennberg (C)

Key subtractions: Evgenii Dadonov (RW), Mike Hoffman (LW), Mike Matheson (D)

After losing to the New York Islanders in four games in the Stanley Cup Qualifiers, the Panthers spent the offseason making changes both on and off the ice. They added a veteran Stanley Cup pedigree with the acquisition of Patric Hornqvist and boosted their offense with the late signing of Anthony Duclair. They also created a Goaltending Excellence Department, headed by Francois Allaire and Roberto Luongo.

The Canes and Panthers played in the Southeast Division for 14 seasons. Carolina captured three division championships, while the Panthers won their first in the 2011-12 season.

Nashville Predators

2019-20 record: 35-26-8, 78 points (.565 points %), 4th in Central Division

CAR vs. NSH in 2019-20: 1-1-0

2019-20 leading scorer: Roman Josi, 65 points (16g, 49a)

Key additions: Matt Benning (D), Mark Borowiecki (D), Luke Kunin (C)

Key subtractions: Nick Bonino (C), Mikael Granlund (C), Craig Smith (RW)

After being upset by the Arizona Coyotes in four games in the Stanley Cup Qualifiers, the Predators retooled their supporting cast around key pieces like forwards Matt Duchene and Filip Forsberg, defensemen Roman Josi and Ryan Ellis and goaltender Pekka Rinne. Josi won the 2020 Norris Trophy after putting up career highs in goals (16), assists (49) and points (65) in 69 games, second among all NHL defensemen in each category.

It's tough to stoke the flames of a rivalry when teams face each other just twice in a given season, but the 2020-21 campaign could be a real chance for a regional rivalry to develop between Carolina and Nashville, two very competitive teams with passionate fan bases in cities separated by only an eight-hour drive. This season series could be a lot of fun.



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Tampa Bay Lightning

2019-20 record: 43-21-6, 92 points (.657 points %), 2nd in Atlantic Division

CAR vs. TB in 2019-20: 2-1-0

2019-20 leading scorer: Nikita Kucherov, 85 points (33g, 52a) in 68 games

Key additions: The Stanley Cup (because really, there's no cap space for anything else)

Key subtractions: Zach Bogosian (D), Kevin Shattenkirk (D)

The Lightning tied an NHL record with 62 wins in the 2018-19 regular season. Just four games into the 2019 postseason, their Cup hopes were suddenly and unpredictably dashed, having been swept by Columbus.

Eighteen months removed from that humbling experience, the Lightning lifted the Stanley Cup after besting the Dallas Stars in six games in the Final inside the Edmonton bubble. Their roster remains largely unchanged, and they figure to be another top team heading into the 2020-21 season.

Tampa Bay is another old foe from the Southeast Division, which the Lightning won in back-to-back seasons (2002-03 and 2003-04). The Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup in 2006 after the Lightning won it in 2004, which was technically the season prior. Fast forward to 2020, and the Lightning are champs again. Could the Canes follow suit in 2021?

How New Divisions, Schedule Will Work in 2020-21 NHL Season

Canes to play 56 games in Central Division

by Michael Smith

The National Hockey League's 2020-21 season is going to look a little bit different, but the good news is that hockey will be back in less than a month's time.

Here's a breakdown of the new divisions, the schedule and the playoff format for the upcoming season.

The New Divisions

Travel restrictions at the United States-Canada border and broader COVID-19 health concerns necessitate temporary realignment for the 2020-21 season.

The seven Canadian teams will comprise a single division, while the remaining 24 U.S.-based teams will be split into three divisions of eight.

The Canes will play in the Central Division, which also includes the Chicago Blackhawks, Columbus Blue Jackets, Dallas Stars, Detroit Red Wings, Florida Panthers, Nashville Predators and Tampa Bay Lightning.

The newly formed Central Division is a hodgepodge collection of teams from the previous Metropolitan, Atlantic and Central Divisions. It includes three Western Conference teams, two of the Canes' old Southeast Division opponents, the 2019-20 Western Conference champions and the defending Stanley Cup champions. The Canes posted a 10-7-1 record against these seven opponents in the shortened 2019-20 season.

Hurricanes Set for 56-Game 2020-21 NHL Season

NHL, NHLPA reach agreement on plans for upcoming season

by Michael Smith

'Tis the season ... for hockey!

The National Hockey League and its Players' Association today announced an agreement for the 2020-21 regular season, which will feature a 56-game schedule for each team. The season is set to begin on Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021, and conclude on May 8, with the top four teams in each of the league's temporarily realigned divisions qualifying for the Stanley Cup Playoffs, which begin on May 11. The Stanley Cup will be awarded around mid-July.

The Schedule

Each team will play the entirety of its 56-game schedule within its division. That makes for a straightforward schedule matrix, at least for the three U.S. divisions, in which each team will face its seven divisional opponents eight times apiece. The seven teams in the North Division will see their six divisional opponents nine or 10 times apiece.

Formal training camps will begin on Sunday, Jan. 3, and there will be no preseason games.

The Canes' full 56-game schedule is expected to be released in the coming days.

The Playoffs

With temporary realignment and no discernible Eastern and Western Conferences, the playoffs will shift to a divisional format.

The top four teams in each division will qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs, which will feature four rounds of best-of-seven series. The first two rounds of the playoffs will showcase intradivisional play, with the first-place team facing the fourth-place team and the second-place team facing the third-place team within each division in the First Round and the winners then squaring off in the Second Round. The four teams that advance to the Semifinals will be seeded by their points total in the regular season, with the familiar 1 vs. 4 and 2 vs. 3 match-up structure. The two remaining teams will then compete for the Stanley Cup.

The Carolina Hurricanes will play the entirety of their schedule within the newly formed Central Division, as a part of the league's temporary realignment. The Central Division also includes the Chicago Blackhawks, Columbus Blue Jackets, Dallas Stars, Detroit Red Wings, Florida Panthers, Nashville Predators and Tampa Bay Lightning.

Formal training camps are set to begin on Sunday, Jan. 3, and there will be no preseason games.

The league will release its health and safety protocols, transition rules, critical dates calendar and the full 2020-21 schedule in the coming days.



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Best of Tripp Tracy and Mike Maniscalco's AMAs

TV voices answer fan questions about broadcasting, nicknames, Taco Bell & more

by Michael Smith

Television broadcasters Tripp Tracy and Mike Maniscalco rounded out the team's Ask Me Anything (AMA) series on the Canes' subreddit, one of the many highlights of Fan Appreciation Week.

Here are the curated best questions and answers from each AMA.

Editor's note: Some questions and answers have been condensed or edited for grammar or clarity.

Tripp Tracy

Who is the biggest Caniac of them all?

Greensboro season ticket holders who have stood strong to this day always have my respect and appreciation.

Also, Frank Sinatra is the hugest Caniac. I'm very certain that he was beaming with pride for his hockey team doing the Storm Surge "my way."

In your opinion as a commentator, who is the most exciting Hurricane to watch and commentate on?

There are so many that come to mind! I enjoyed doing games between the benches, and I remember one shift and Roddy came off the ice, and you could see he was in a little bit of pain. He said something like, "No big deal," but he had just torn his ACL and MCL. He skated off the ice like it was no big deal.

Cam Ward in his prime was so fun to watch. I love the emotion of Petr [Mrazek] and how he feeds off the fans.

I also love watching the willingness to try anything of Svech.

Sebastian Aho, when he went toe to toe with Leon Draisaitl, was just amazing.

What is your favorite part of the game of hockey? What part of broadcasting do you enjoy most?

My favorite part of the game is the people, hands down. The relationships and friendships that, had it not been for hockey, I never would've met.

As far as broadcasting, I consider myself a spectator. The chance to watch this market grow and become part of the fabric of the community and the hockey world is something that is so special for me.

What is your all-time holy grail of Taco Bell orders?

First of all, I have walked the Taco Bell drive-through in a little place called Put-in-Bay, Ohio, at 1:30 in the morning. Back in the day, when I had a younger man's metabolism, it would be something like:

- 6 beef Meximelts
- 3 steak soft tacos
- 2 hard tacos

- 2 soft tacos
- A Mexican pizza or two
- Probably some Mountain Dew, as well

I love the beef Meximelt is because it is the perfect transition, easy-to-eat item to have after a game.

Mike Maniscalco

How do you work to improve your play-by-play skills in the offseason? What is one game you wish you could have broadcast?

I watch or listen to the games that I have called and try to pick up if I am repeating words or phrases. I am a play-by-play enthusiast, so I try to listen to as many different voices and styles that I can. That said, there really is no substitute for experience. So, I am hoping we get back to playing soon.

The game I wish I could have called is Team USA vs. the Soviets at Lake Placid in the Olympics, but Al Michaels has a pretty good call. It is probably best I was only 4 at the time.

How long has being in the booth been an aspiration of yours?

When it became crystal clear my athletic ability was not going to get me into professional sports, I pinpoint my junior year of college when I became part of the Buffalo State Bengals broadcast booth in the fall of 1994. I actually did color my first year with Mark Gorton, who was such an incredible play-by-play voice as a college student. That's when I knew for sure it was what I wanted to do.

How did you overcome the usual anxieties that came with being on television when you started?

I am always nervous before a broadcast, and I will be just as nervous for the next one as I was for my first Canes game on camera. And let's face it: I'm no Liam Hemsworth. However, I know I have done the prep work, I work with great people and I have done thousands of radio broadcasts. So, when the on-air light goes on, just forget about it and have fun. I'm talking about hockey for a living, so once it's time to go I didn't think about it.

John Forslund was obviously beloved by Canes fans, but you've done a great job filling his shoes. Did you feel a lot of pressure to "live up" to his reputation and commentating style?

I can only be me and do the job the way I can, not how someone else did. There is always pressure. I know how great the job John and Chuck Kaiton did and the legacy they have. But, no, I didn't feel any more pressure than what I put on myself to do my best.

Who's the funniest guy on the team to interview?

There are a few guys who are good for a laugh during almost every interview. In alphabetical order: Sebastian Aho, Dougie Hamilton, Jordan Martinook, Brett Pesce and James Reimer.

Where did the name The Big Rig come from?

Tripp Tracy. I have a husky build, and during a TV broadcast in my first year, I was going from place to place in the arena.



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To paraphrase Tripp, he said, "You don't want to get caught in front of that big rig coming at you."

I rated the podcast 5 stars, so we are basically best friends... right? My question for you: How much freedom do the Canes give you for your podcast? Can you do pretty much anything you want most of the time? Bonus question: Which Hurricane do you pick if you had to win a game of Tetris?

Best friends for sure! The Canes give us total freedom on the podcast. Michael and I are very fortunate to have that trust from the team. However, as the years have moved on, the

An Inside Look at Analytics With Eric Tulsy

The best of Tulsy's Reddit AMA

by Michael Smith

As Vice President of Hockey Management and Strategy for the Carolina Hurricanes, Eric Tulsy provides and analyzes data to assist the hockey operations department and coaching staff.

That's about the most unambiguous way to describe the role of Tulsy, who pioneered the Canes' ever-growing data department in a full-time capacity more than five years ago. Tulsy is a smart man with a rich scientific background, and while the world of hockey analytics is a secretive business - it kind of has to be in order for teams to gain even the slightest bit of competitive edge in the salary cap era - Tulsy provided an inside glimpse at his role during an Ask Me Anything (AMA) session on Reddit.

Here are the highlights from his AMA, the latest in a weeklong series as a part of Fan Appreciation Week.

Editor's note: Some questions and answers have been condensed or edited for grammar or clarity.

How likely are you to score an empty-net goal, and how much does it increase over time? What is the actual best time to pull a goalie?

I remember having a conversation with someone once, a casual fan who was questioning the value of pulling the goalie. "It seems like it never works," he said. "That's true," I replied, "the only thing that works less often is not pulling the goalie."

The best time to pull a goalie is a complicated question. The arithmetic is pretty straightforward if you assume a certain rate of scoring or giving up a goal, but things are never that simple in real life.

Published estimates say that the best time to pull the goalie when you are down by two is with seven minutes left, but those estimates are based on looking at scoring rates in the existing environment. Right now, teams play their best offensive players for the vast majority of their 6-on-5 time, but you can't just plan on having your top line play for seven minutes straight. Does their ability to score drop as they get fatigued? Is it risky to try to change on the fly with no goalie in net? How much lower is the second unit's scoring rate? If you pull that early, are you just rotating the two units for seven minutes, or do you have to give your six least-dangerous scorers a shift at some point?

Head Strength and Conditioning Coach of the Hurricanes Bill Burniston has become our unofficial ombudsman.

As for Tetris, it has to be Andrei Svechnikov.

Do you prefer Eastern or Western barbecue? (Bill Burniston can see his way out)

The answer is yes. I have no preference. There are times when I want Eastern style and others when I appreciate the saucier Western. I know people think there is, but there is no wrong answer to this question. Bill Burniston will be texting in 3... 2... 1...

Like many things, something that seems like a simple question at first glance has a lot of ways the analysis can go wrong.

If they added a "2 goal" shot line, statically where would it be?

I'm generally more open to experimenting with rules than a lot of people are, but this is one that I'd have a hard time with. Not because I hate the idea, but because I'm not sure it would impact play the way you'd like it to.

The idea of making a rule like that would presumably be to open up the interior. You create high-value shots on the perimeter, and then the defense has to stretch a little more, and it creates more room for skill plays. That's more or less what happens in basketball.

But there's a key difference in hockey: You can defend the perimeter without stretching out to pressure the puck directly because you can block a shot from 30' away. If anything, this might actually make teams sag more because it increases the penalty if you pressure the top of the zone and get beaten by a pass.

I guess I haven't directly answered your question, but unless you put the line far enough away that teams would largely ignore it, I think it might have the opposite effect of what people are imagining. So my instinct is not to have a line like that - all goals should count as one, except maybe lacrosse goals.

Is plus/minus a good stat?

The traditional way that plus/minus is formulated is kind of silly; lumping in things like empty net goals and shorthanded goals really screws things up. There are examples of seasons where two teammates had similar results at even strength but saw empty net and shorthanded goals produce a 30-goal swing, which can obviously get in the way of a lot of attempts to use traditional plus/minus to draw a conclusion.

But if you narrow things down to just even strength, or just five-on-five, there's nothing wrong with it. Like any stat, you have to be careful about how you use it - it can be influenced by who the player plays with and against, and the sample sizes are small enough to produce some fluctuations that don't mean much, but with the right context and understanding, obviously it's valuable to know if a player can repeatedly help his team outscore his opponents.

What does a typical trade negotiation look like?

Typical? The median is probably something like this:



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"Would you move [insert name of good player]"

"No chance."

Can you talk about the difference between the data available to NHL teams and publicly available data? How useful are the models that use publicly available data, and do you ever look at them?

The league publishes a lot of information about each game: what time each shift started and ended and a variety of events (shots, hits, turnovers, etc) that took place during that shift. There is a lot that you can do with that - remember, using that information to answer questions is how I got my start in working with hockey data.

But there are gaps in the data as well; it can tell you that someone took a shot from the faceoff dot at 8:32, but not much about how that shot came about or what other options he might have had. So the public models generally rely on inferring a player's impact from looking at how the team's results change when he is on the ice - and that can be done very well, and can be powerful. But when you want to move from talking about what happened to talking about why it happened or what could have been done differently, you often need a richer data set.

And yes, we absolutely do look at work done in the public sphere. A couple of years ago, I gave a talk about it at the Sloan Sports Analytics Conference. One of the things I talked about there was how external work can help counteract a bias that I don't hear discussed very often.

No two people look at things exactly the same way; everyone has traits they value a little more than average or a little less than average. When a player is available - whether it's through the draft, the trade market, or free agency - more often than not, he will end up being acquired by someone who values something about his play more than most teams do.

So over time, you end up with a roster full of players who you like more than most teams do, and so you think your team is better than most people do. That's not just a data thing; it's true regardless of how you form your opinions about players. And external opinions can be helpful for counteracting that bias; it can highlight for you where those biggest disagreements are and give you a chance to re-examine your perspective and think about what you might be missing.

(If you are allowed to share) ... How does the Hurricanes' analytics department distinguish itself from other teams' departments? Broadly speaking, what analyses or evaluations does this team have that give it an advantage over the rest of the NHL?

It's a pretty secretive business, and it's hard to know what other teams have -- if you can get them to tell you, let me know and we'll compare notes. We could be dead last in innovation and I don't know if I'd have any way of knowing that.

So it's hard for me to answer the question about comparing ourselves to other teams directly, but I will say that we've gotten a lot of mileage out of a focus on communication and helping to organize and present information of all types.

The Canes' drafting strategy appears to be looking for high-upside skill players at every stage in the draft and avoiding "safe" low ceiling picks. Is this because it is easier to find value in veteran 3rd and 4th line guys via trade or free agency?

I don't think there are any safe picks in the NHL Draft.

In the NFL, a team will be looking at a 23-year-old who's going to play for them next year; the scout's job is mostly about projecting how his skills will translate. But in the NHL, we're drafting an 18-year-old - in addition to estimating how his skills will translate, our amateur scouting group has the daunting task of projecting what he will look like after five years of development.

Even the top pick in the draft isn't safe - it might be a reasonably safe bet that he'll play in the NHL, but he has a long way to go to become the player you need him to be. There's a huge range of possible outcomes for every player in the draft, and the goal isn't to pick a player with a high floor or a high ceiling; it's to think about all of a player's possible outcomes and pick someone who would be a good bet.

How does your PhD/past career help in your role? What was the transition to sports data science like?

Honestly, the technical side of my background is almost completely irrelevant. If we ever want to deposit a nanometer-thick layer of insulating material on the outside of our equipment (or our players, I suppose), I will definitely be heavily involved in that, but otherwise, not so much.

But there are a lot of soft skills that translate. The thing that makes chemistry difficult - especially the branch of chemistry I worked in - is that it often lacks clear and unequivocal evidence about what is happening. You can make a variety of measurements that might suggest that the molecules did a certain thing, but those measurements rarely look exactly how you expected and often disagree with each other to some degree. So being successful in that field requires being good at keeping a bunch of possibilities in mind - you have to have good judgment not just about what the most likely explanation is, but also about what other explanations are possible and what their implications would be and how you can test them. The exact same thing happens with sports data.

And I've also leaned quite a bit on skills I picked up in my time in industry. Working at a global conglomerate for five years gave me a lot of exposure to industrial processes; I got a lot of training on things like group decision-making and strategic planning and employee mentoring. And then working at start-ups for the next five gave me a chance to see which elements translate well into an environment that has pace and pressure more like the NHL.

Hi Eric, how frequent are your interactions with Darren Yorke on the non-analytics side of the house?

"We are constantly collaborating with one another. We're not an organization that is built on the poles. There isn't an eye test vs. analytics. We're all on the same team, trying to gather as much information as we can to make the best decision possible. - Darren Yorke"

- Eric Tulsky



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Tweetmail No. 245: Fan Appreciation Week

by Michael Smith

Hello and welcome to Tweetmail, a regular feature on Hurricanes.com in which I answer your Twitter questions, which are mostly about the Carolina Hurricanes. It's a mailbag of tweets. It's Tweetmail. Maybe you learn something, and maybe we have some fun, too.

It's Fan Appreciation Week, and you don't want to miss any of our deluge of giveaways, so let's get to it.

Assuming a Jan. 13 start date, when does training camp open up? - @BornACaniac

If reports from NHL insiders are accurate - and they typically are, given how dialed in reporters like Elliotte Friedman, Pierre LeBrun and Frank Seravalli are - and the NHL and NHLPA can approve all of the relevant return to play details in a timely manner, the plan would be to open training camp the first weekend in January, sometime between Friday, Jan. 1 and Sunday, Jan. 13. The 2020-21 season, with each team playing a 56-game schedule, would then begin on Wednesday, Jan. 13.

That's all subject to change so much so that it might have changed in the time it took me to type out the paragraph above.

And, of course, nothing is official until it is. When will that be? Let's hope for an early Christmas present.

What should the 2020-21 division names be? I suggest the Canes be part of the Swedish Pizza division. - @RichSlevs

That's not a bad idea, Rich, given that my understanding of Swedish pizza, which Jesper Fast mentioned on episode 144 of CanesCast, is that it's simply a little bit of anything and everything on top of a pizza. The reported division the Canes would be in embodies that same spirit.

To provide some context: The NHL is facing temporary realignment for the 2020-21 season, something that Commissioner Gary Bettman has publicly stated. Because travel across the border between the United States and Canada is extremely difficult right now, there is likely to be an all-Canadian division comprised of those seven teams. The remaining 24 U.S.-based teams will be divided into three divisions of eight. Based on recent reports, the Canes are likely to be either in the "Central" or "East" division.

With that, here's a guess at what they'll probably be called:

- East
- Central
- West
- Canada

And here are some alternatives:

- East: Metropolitan, Northeast, Patrick
- Central: South, South Central, Norris
- West: Frequent Flyer, Adams(?)

- Canada: The Bubble, Mr. Division, Smythe

Maybe we'll get a concrete answer soon.

When the season does eventually start, will the Hurricanes and the other teams be playing in a bubble like they did for the Stanley Cup this year? And when will Rod Brind'Amour sign a contract extension? - @Jessica62399703

As of right now, the plan is not to play the 2020-21 season in a bubble. It's logistically challenging, financially straining and it would be a hard sell to both the players and clubs to commit to such an endeavor. There could, however, be regional hubs for a period of time. Bettman floated this idea for areas where COVID-19 is spiking and the medical system is taxed. The league is considering any and all options, though I don't expect to see a full-fledged bubble again.

Not to worry about Rod Brind'Amour's contract, which expires after the 2020-21 season. He's not going anywhere, and I get the impression that, as long as he wants the job, he'll be head coach of the Carolina Hurricanes.

Can you please ask Jordan Staal who his favorite Formula 1 driver or team is? I've been dying to know since he mentioned watching Drive to Survive in an interview earlier this year. This is vital information for me. (I need to confirm he has taste.) - @westeros_queen

You are correct, Shimee. Jordan Staal did indeed watch the Netflix series "Formula 1: Drive to Survive." But, beyond that?

"I can't say I've ever watched a race," he told me.

However, with his knowledge of the Netflix series, he picked Lewis Hamilton as his favorite with Charles Leclerc as "a close second."

I'm unfortunately not familiar with any of this, so I hope this means he has good taste!

Who do you see out of the Canes prospects will have the biggest impact on their team at the World Juniors? - @powerplay53

The Canes have four forward prospects competing in the 2021 World Junior Championship: Ryan Suzuki (Canada), Vasily Ponomarev (Russia), Noel Gunler (Sweden) and Zion Nybeck (Sweden).

Depending on how Sweden utilizes Gunler and Nybeck, those will be two to watch. Gunler, who the Canes drafted with the 41st overall pick (2nd round) in October, has the potential to be a real impact player for his club.

"He's a player who is able to transition the puck and get it from the neutral zone to the offensive zone and make plays. When he gets the puck on his stick, he can score," said Darren Yorke, the Canes director of player personnel. "He has the dual threat of making plays and being a goal scorer."

Ponomarev, also a second-round pick (53rd overall) from the 2020 NHL Draft, could pack a little scoring punch down the middle of Russia's lineup, too.

Canada is the odds-on favorite to win the tournament (again), and their forward group is stacked with so many who could be



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impact players. Given his skill level, Suzuki could potentially be one of them, and maybe he can grab the gold medal that eluded his big brother, Nick, in 2019.

Do you think the SAT line is underrated among the league's top lines? - @MarcusZhang7

The Canes' top line of Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen is certainly underrated because, well, you could make the argument that all three players are individually underrated, Teravainen perhaps most so. Teravainen's playmaking ability, his keen awareness to know where his linemates are on the ice at all times and then find them with a tape-to-tape pass, is something to behold. I mean, this play still makes my jaw drop, even though I know how it ends.

The trio combined for 77 goals and 113 assists for an even 190 points in 68 games during the 2019-20 season. All were nearly point-per-game producers, with Aho being the closest (66 points in 68 games). Despite not completing a full season,

Best of Darren Yorke's AMA

Yorke answers fan questions on draft, scouting & more
by Michael Smith

As a part of Fan Appreciation Week festivities, members of the Carolina Hurricanes front office and broadcast team are answering your questions in Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions on the Canes' subreddit.

Darren Yorke, the team's head of player personnel, batted leadoff on Monday afternoon. Here are the highlights from his AMA.

Editor's note: Some questions and answers have been condensed or corrected for grammar or clarity. Canadian spelling variations, however, remain.

"Hi, this is Darren Yorke. I've served as Director of Player Personnel for the Carolina Hurricanes. I am in my 11th season with the organization and here to answer your questions," he wrote. "Thanks for being such amazing fans. We're honoured to represent the Carolinas."

How frequent are your interactions with Eric Tulsy on the analytics/strategy side of the house? What are the different metrics, criteria, etc. you use for the draft versus acquiring players via trade/free agency?

Eric and I chat all the time. We are constantly collaborating with one another. We're not an organization that is built on the poles. There isn't an eye test vs. analytics. We're all on the same team, trying to gather as much information as we can to make the best decision possible. As for the second part of your question, the types of information that you gather in advance of drafting a player vs. a trade are very similar. We have the traditional scouting metrics that we use for both drafting and trading. The difference is when a player makes it to the NHL, we have a longer history of data that we have access to.

Eric Tulsy (Photoshop aficionado?) responded with this masterpiece

Aho had already crushed his previous career high in goals (30) with 38, well on track to cross the 40-goal mark. Svechnikov improved statistically in every category from his rookie season with 24 goals, 37 assists and 61 points. Teravainen was on track to record a career high 57 assists and likely would have tickled both the 20-goal mark and his career high in points (76) from the season prior.

With an even shorter season on the horizon, it's going to be difficult for any career numbers to be reached in 2020-21, but they could each be tracking in that direction. The line is going to drive the Canes' offense, and in my eyes, it's one of the most dangerous and underrated top lines in the league.

More questions and more answers coming your way soon!

If you have a question you'd like answered or you've enjoyed AMA week on Reddit, you can find me on Twitter at @MSmithCanes, or you can drop me an email.

Yorke: As much as we talk I had no idea how clever he could be with Photoshop.

As Director of Player Personnel, can you give us a hint on who to keep an eye on during the World Juniors, other than our current prospects?

The World Jr. tournament is one of my favourites to watch. Like you said, I'll be watching our prospects, while at the same time evaluating the other teams' top prospects. It's a great to watch the best U-20 players in the world compete against one another. In addition, I'll be looking at some of the key draft eligible players who were fortunate enough to make their teams.

Obviously your team is looking at players for the upcoming draft, but are you already starting to look at players for future drafts, maybe even a few years down the road?

The bulk of our focus is on the current draft year. However, when we're at games or watching video, [we might see] who will be draft eligible a year or two in the future. A big international tournament is the World U-17, which is a great tournament to get a sense of the upcoming draft talent. It's important for us to gather as much information on the players when they're 16 and 17 prior to their draft year to gauge where they're on their development curve.

How do you evaluate a prospects ceiling/floor for potential, and how does that factor into the draft?

We're more interested in a player's ceiling than we are their floor. We try to gather as much information as we can to make that projection. Typically, the players with the highest ceiling are already out-performing their class. They're the smartest, most skilled, fastest and highly competitive. They've had strong production at every level. When they get opportunities to play at a high level, the adjustment period is minimal. Sebastian Aho, for example, was able to play at high level in the Liiga at 17 years old. He was one of the best players on Finland's World Jr. team that year, as well.



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How long ago did you start planning in preparation for the expansion draft?

We've had discussions about the expansion draft for a year or so already. We'll continue to ramp up those conversations as move closer to the off-season. It's good to be prepared for the unknowns. We know what our roster looks like today, but we don't know what it will look like at the end of the season. That is true for all 31 teams. So, while we can't be certain to how it's going to play out, we can mock up different scenarios to help with future planning.

Which player on the Hurricanes has shown to have the biggest drive to win and strive to achieve their best?

I think we're fortunate to have a team that has learned from the best in terms of competitiveness. Rod Brind'Amour raised the bar as a player. Our team feeds off that energy and takes on his personality. Guys like Staal, Aho, Svech, Slavin and others don't plan on letting their foot off the gas any time soon. They know what is expected and love when the expectations are high.

Who has been your favorite player you've seen come up through the Canes organization? Who do we need to be paying attention to more that may be stashed away?

I don't know if I can single one specific player as my favourite. I love seeing the players grow both on and off the ice. I get to see them mature from the time they were drafted through their time with the Canes. It's been fun getting to see guys like Jaccob Slavin go from being a teenager to living out his dream as an NHL player and then being a father. I'm fortunate to be able to see that type of growth. As for a player that you may need to be paying attention to, I think Tuukka Tieksola is a player to track. He hasn't played as much on the international level, so he may not get the exposure he deserves. However, I promise you if you search some of his highlights, you won't be disappointed.

On Oct. 12, 2018, Manager of Communications and Team Services Pace Sagester was fined four dozen Bojangles biscuits for being caught on camera dabbing with Aho. Have any motions been taken within the organization to prevent future intentional and forceful dabs?

Pace has had a couple of conversations with sr. management because of this behaviour. Although, if Aho continues to play well because of the dabs, we may have to allow Pace to continue.

"Thanks for questions!" Yorke signed off. "It was fun."



Super 16: Top NHL defensemen

Hedman, Josi, Carlson among best in NHL.com rankings
by Dan Rosen

The Super 16 is back to close out 2020. This week, a look at the top 16 defensemen in the NHL today. Next week, the Super 16 will focus on the top goalies.

Who is the best defenseman in the NHL right now?

The vote was close, a near toss-up between the reigning winners of the Norris Trophy and the Conn Smythe Trophy.

Maybe it was Victor Hedman's Norris win in 2017-18, before he won the Conn Smythe by helping the Tampa Bay Lightning win the Stanley Cup last season, that nudged him ahead of Nashville Predators defenseman Roman Josi and into the top spot in the Super 16.

Hedman was ranked first by 11 of the participating NHL.com staff members and No. 2 by the other two, who each had Josi at No. 1. Josi was ranked No. 2 by 10 of the staff members.

Washington Capitals defenseman John Carlson, the runner-up to Josi for the Norris Trophy last season, finished with enough voting points to land at No. 3, three points ahead of Alex Pietrangelo, now of the Vegas Golden Knights.

There were 32 defensemen representing 23 teams ranked by at least one of the 13 voters.

To create the Super 16, each of the 13 staff members put together his or her version of what they think it should look like. Those were submitted, and a point total was assigned to each.

The defensemen selected first was given 16 points, second got 15, third 14 and so on down to No. 16, who got one point.

Here is the Super 16:

1. Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay Lightning

Total points: 206

Hedman was voted the Conn Smythe Trophy winner as MVP of the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season, when he had 22 points, including leading all defensemen in the playoffs with 10 goals. Hedman won the Norris Trophy as the best defenseman in the NHL in 2017-18 and finished third in the voting last season. He has finished in the top three of the Norris voting in four straight seasons.

2. Roman Josi, Nashville Predators

Total points: 194

Josi won the Norris Trophy for the first time last season, when he led the Predators with 65 points (16 goals, 49 assists). He had a plus-22 rating while averaging 25:47 of ice time per game. Josi had 19 more assists and 17 more points than any



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other Nashville player. He was the first Predators player to win the Norris.

3. John Carlson, Washington Capitals

Total points: 153

Carlson led NHL defensemen with 75 points (15 goals, 60 assists) last season. He helped the Capitals win the Stanley Cup in 2018, when he scored 20 points (five goals, 15 assists) in 24 playoff games. Carlson has the most points among all defensemen in the past three seasons with 213 (43 goals, 170 assists) in 231 games.

4. Alex Pietrangolo, Vegas Golden Knights

Total points: 150

Pietrangolo helped the St. Louis Blues win the Stanley Cup in 2019 by scoring 19 points (three goals, 16 assists) and averaging 25:45 of ice time in the playoffs. He was sixth among defensemen in scoring last season with 52 points, including a career-best 16 goals, and was fourth in the Norris Trophy voting. Pietrangolo signed a seven-year, \$61.6 million contract with the Golden Knights on Oct. 13.

5. Seth Jones, Columbus Blue Jackets

Total points: 143

Jones had 30 points (six goals, 24 assists) in 56 games last season before an ankle injury ended his season Feb. 8. Only a handful of players play more minutes per game than Jones. He is 10th in the NHL in ice time per game (24:44) and fifth in even-strength ice time per game (20:18) in the past four seasons. In that same time, Jones was on the ice for fewer even-strength goals-against (252) than 23 defensemen who played fewer even-strength minutes per game than he did.

6. Miro Heiskanen, Dallas Stars

Total points: 116

Heiskanen led all defensemen in the playoffs last season by scoring 26 points (six goals, 20 assists) in 27 games. He has scored 68 points (20 goals, 48 assists) in 150 NHL games in his two seasons. The 21-year-old was the No. 3 pick in the 2017 NHL Draft. He averaged 23:25 of ice time per game in his two seasons.

7. Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche

Total points: 107

Makar was voted the Calder Trophy winner as NHL rookie of the year last season, when he scored 50 points (12 goals, 38 assists) in 57 games, averaging 21:01 of ice time per game. He led all defensemen who played at least 50 games with 1.82 points per 60 minutes. Makar was ninth in the Norris Trophy voting.

8. Jacob Slavin, Carolina Hurricanes

Total points: 87

Slavin is fifth in the NHL in shot attempts percentage (55.0) since 2017-18 among the 204 defensemen who have played at least 100 games. He had a 55.4 SAT percentage last season, when he scored an NHL career-best 36 points (six goals, 30 assists) and had a plus-30 rating while averaging

23:24 of ice time per game in 68 games. It was his fourth straight season scoring at least 30 points. He was fifth in the Norris Trophy voting last season.

9. Shea Theodore, Vegas Golden Knights

Total points: 86

Theodore's point production has increased in each of the past three seasons, from 29 points (six goals, 23 assists) in 61 games in 2017-18 to 37 points (12 goals, 25 assists) in 79 games in 2018-19 to 46 points (13 goals, 33 assists) in 71 games last season. He was nearly a point-per-game player in the playoffs last season with 19 points (seven goals, 12 assists) in 20 games. Theodore also led all defensemen last season with a 58.5 SAT percentage (minimum 20 games played). He was sixth in the Norris Trophy voting.

10. Quinn Hughes, Vancouver Canucks

Total points: 72

Hughes was the runner-up to Makar for the Calder Trophy last season, when he led all rookies and was tied for fourth among all defensemen with 53 points (eight goals, 45 assists) in 68 games. He was tied for third among defensemen with 25 points on the power play. Hughes averaged 21:53 of ice time per game, second among all rookies. He then scored 16 points (two goals, 14 assists) in 17 playoff games.

11. Dougie Hamilton, Carolina Hurricanes

Total points: 58

Hamilton's 55.4 SAT percentage since 2014-15 leads NHL defensemen (minimum 100 games played). He was on his way to the best season of his career last season, when he scored 40 points (14 goals, 26 assists) in 47 games before sustaining a season-ending leg injury Jan. 16. Hamilton was fourth among all defensemen in scoring at the time of his injury and was averaging 23:17 of ice time per game. He was seventh in the Norris Trophy voting.

12. Kris Letang, Pittsburgh Penguins

Total points: 57

Since the 2010-11 season, Letang, a three-time Stanley Cup champion with the Penguins, ranks fifth among defensemen with 458 points (106 goals, 352 assists) in 591 games. He is second in points per game (0.77) among defensemen who have played more than one season. In that same time, he's fifth in the NHL in average ice time per game (25:24). He scored 44 points (15 goals, 29 assists) in 61 games last season.

13. Charlie McAvoy, Boston Bruins

Total points: 51

Torey Krug and Zdeno Chara received a lot of the attention in Boston last season, but it was McAvoy who was the Bruins' most utilized defensemen and arguably their best. He averaged 23:10 of ice time, more than two minutes more than Krug and Chara. McAvoy scored 32 points (five goals, 27 assists) and had a plus-24 rating. He also had a 51.5 SAT percentage despite starting 50.8 percent of his shifts in the defensive zone or neutral zone.



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14. Shea Weber, Montreal Canadiens

Total points: 40

Weber has been one of the most consistently strong two-way defensemen in the NHL for more than a decade. He scored 36 points (15 goals, 21 assists) in 65 games last season. He was on pace for what would have been his 10th season with 40 or more points. He started only 47.3 percent of his shifts in the offensive zone last season but still finished with a 54.3 SAT percentage. It was the fourth-highest SAT percentage among the 89 defensemen who started fewer than 50 percent of their shifts in the offensive zone (minimum 50 games).

15. Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets

Total points: 35

#NHLTopPlayers: Nos. 30-21

NHL Network reveals best of current crop

by David Satriano

NHL Network is getting ready for this season by ranking the top 50 players in the League. Researchers, producers and on-air personalities compiled the list, and players 30-21 were revealed Sunday in the premiere of the seventh program in a nine-part offseason series. Here is the list:

30. John Tavares, C, Toronto Maple Leafs

Tavares set NHL career highs in goals (47; third in NHL), points (88) and rating (plus-19) in 2018-19, his first season with the Maple Leafs. He scored 26 goals last season and has scored at least 24 every season since entering the NHL with the New York Islanders in 2009-10. Tavares scored at least 60 points for the ninth time in 10 full NHL seasons and won 55.3 percent of his face-offs, the sixth straight season he won at least 50 percent.

"John Tavares has been money since he's gotten [to Toronto]," NHL Network analyst Mike Rupp said. "He's over a point-per-game type player for the Toronto Maple Leafs and has been for most of his career. ... I love what he's done. He's lived up to the bill."

29. Sebastian Aho, C, Carolina Hurricanes

Aho scored an NHL career-high 38 goals last season and led the Hurricanes in points for the second straight season with 66. He scored four shorthanded goals and leads the NHL with eight over the past two seasons. Aho had eight multigoal games and was one of 11 players to score at least five points in a game (three goals, two assists against the Minnesota Wild on Dec. 7). He has scored at least 65 points in each of the past three seasons and led Carolina with 12 points (three goals, nine assists) in eight Stanley Cup Playoff games last season.

"There's something to be said when the other team starts game planning for you and then you still put those numbers up," Rupp said. "But when they're game planning for him and he still does it, gets better every year ... that's where that kid is a really special player."

28. Mark Stone, RW, Vegas Golden Knights

Werenski scored 41 points, including an NHL-high 20 goals among defensemen, in 63 games last season. He has scored at least 41 points in three of his four NHL seasons and has reached double digits in goals in each of the four seasons.

16. Ivan Provorov, Philadelphia Flyers

Total points: 33

Provorov is coming off his best season since debuting in the NHL in 2016-17, and it was noticeable in how the Flyers played too. He scored 36 points (13 goals, 26 assists) in 69 games and was on pace for an NHL career-high 42 points before the pause. Provorov was plus-11 after being minus-16 with 26 points in 82 games in 2018-19. The Flyers finished tied for seventh in goals-against per game (2.77) last season. They were 29th (3.41 per game) in 2018-19, when Provorov struggled.

Stone scored 63 points (21 goals, 42 assists) in 65 games to top the 60-point mark for the fifth time in the past six seasons. He led Golden Knights forwards in ice time per game (19:25) and was second in shorthanded ice time per game (1:56). He was tied for second in the NHL in takeaways (78), the third time in the past four seasons he finished in the top two in the category. Stone, who was voted the runner-up for the Selke Trophy in 2018-19, awarded to the best defensive forward, has scored 74 points (26 goals, 48 assists) in 83 regular-season games and 29 points (13 goals, 16 assists) in 27 playoff games with the Golden Knights since being acquired in a trade from the Ottawa Senators on Feb. 25, 2019.

"Usually the guys that are in that echelon (for goals) don't lock it down defensively in a lot of areas," Rupp said. "He doesn't have to cheat to get the offense. Is he ever going to get 100 points? I don't believe so. But as a winger, he was a Selke finalist."

27. Mark Scheifele, C, Winnipeg Jets

Scheifele has been one of the most consistent centers in the NHL during the past five seasons. He tied Kyle Connor for the Jets lead with 73 points (29 goals, 44 assists) last season after leading them with 38 goals and scoring an NHL career-high 84 points in 2018-19. Scheifele has scored at least 29 goals in four of the past five seasons and at least 73 points in three of the five. He scored 14 goals in 17 games in the 2018 playoffs.

"If you're asking me for centerman today, to go into a playoff series ... there might be three or four in the League that I'd pick over him. That's how high I think of him," Rupp said. "He doesn't get the attention as much as he probably should."

26. Alex Pietrangolo, D, Vegas Golden Knights

Pietrangolo scored an NHL career-high 16 goals in 70 games for the St. Louis Blues last season, and his 52 points were two shy of his high, set in 2017-18. He also set NHL career highs in power-play points (22; six goals, 16 assists) and shots on goal (225) playing a St. Louis-leading average of 24:11 per game. Pietrangolo, who was Blues captain from 2016-20, helped them to the best points percentage in the Western Conference last season (.662) after leading NHL defensemen



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with 19 points (three goals, 16 assists) in 26 games in the 2019 playoffs, when St. Louis won the Stanley Cup for the first time in its history. He scored six points (one goal, five assists) in nine games in the 2020 postseason before signing a seven-year contract with Vegas on Oct. 12.

"He is consistent. He eats a lot of minutes, he can add to your power play, he's very solid defensively," Rupp said. "He does everything good. Nothing's going to blow you out of the water, but he's solid and he eats up those minutes which are so important."

25. Jonathan Huberdeau, LW, Florida Panthers

Huberdeau led the Panthers with 78 points (23 goals, 55 assists) in 69 games last season after his 92 points (30 goals, 62 assists) were second to center Aleksander Barkov's 96 in 2018-19. He led them in power-play points (29), was second among forwards in ice time per game (18:46), became Florida's all-time leader in points (437), and had seven games with at least three points to help Florida earn a berth in the Stanley Cup Qualifiers.

"I like where he's at on this list," Rupp said. "What he did in the strange season of 2019-20, he's still on pace to be a 90-plus-point guy. ... This guy has put the points up. ... Jonathan Huberdeau, I don't think we've seen the ceiling on him yet."

24. Mikko Rantanen, RW, Colorado Avalanche

Although he was limited to 42 games last season because of injuries, Rantanen was fifth on the Avalanche with 41 points (19 goals, 22 assists) after scoring at least 84 in each of the previous two seasons. He is tied with center Nathan MacKinnon for first on the Avalanche with 36 power-play goals and second with 82 power-play points (36 goals, 46 assists) to MacKinnon's 100 since 2017-18. Rantanen has scored 35 points (13 goals, 22 assists) in 27 playoff games the past two seasons.

"Health is the biggest concern with this guy because if he is healthy ... he could crack top 10 on this list," Rupp said. "This guy is that good."

23. Aleksander Barkov, C, Florida Panthers

Barkov scored 62 points (20 goals, 42 assists) in 66 games last season after setting NHL career highs in goals (35), assists (61) and points (96) in 2018-19. He won the Lady Byng

Trophy voted as the most gentlemanly player in the NHL in 2018-19, when he was called for four minor penalties all season and finished fifth in voting for the Selke Trophy.

"I love his game, I love him as a player -- he's got to find that next level, though," Rupp said. "He's not underrated anymore, and now I think that he's getting to that point, if they're going to have success in South Florida, Sasha Barkov's got to crank that up to another level."

22. Mika Zibanejad, C, New York Rangers

Zibanejad had the only five-goal game in the NHL last season (March 5 against the Washington Capitals) and led the NHL in goals per game (0.72; 41 in 57). Although he missed 13 games with an upper-body injury, he set NHL career highs for goals and points (75), increasing his total in each for the third straight season. Zibanejad led Rangers forwards in ice time per game (21:38) and shorthanded ice time per game (2:37), and he was tied for third in the NHL with five shorthanded points (three goals, two assists).

"Mika had an unbelievable year this year," Rupp said. "This guy could be -- he was in the conversation for the Hart. He should be in the conversation for Selkes. He was in the running for the Rocket [Richard Trophy] this year for goals. He's the complete package, Mika."

21. Mitchell Marner, RW, Toronto Maple Leafs

After leading Toronto with an NHL career-high 94 points (26 goals, 68 assists) in 2018-19, he finished second last season with 67 points, including a Toronto-leading 51 assists, behind center Auston Matthews's 80. Marner led Maple Leafs forwards in ice time per game for the second straight season (21:33) and scored 24 power-play points (six goals, 18 assists), his fourth straight season with at least 20. He had four assists in five postseason games last season.

"He's the one player, if you plucked him out of that, the team would be hurt the most," Rupp said. "He drives offense. He sets up plays, he runs that power play ... you don't notice those things a lot of times because you have John Tavares, you have Auston Matthews. Mitch Marner, he's been awesome."



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Carolina Hurricanes top 25 under 25 #11: Dominik Bokk

Coming in just outside the top 10 of our list is the key return piece in the Justin Faulk trade.

By kleblanchockey

Bokk has started slowly for the second season in a row, with just two points in his first 13 games for his new Swedish club Djurgardens. Last year, the German-born winger finished strong so we can hope for more of the same in 2021 as he adapts to his third organization in the last three seasons. Arguably the main piece of the Justin Faulk trade to St. Louis, Bokk has since been regarded as one of the Canes' most promising players outside of the NHL.

Offensively, you can see how dangerous Bokk is, even from a limited viewing. The individual talent that he possesses is among the best of the Carolina prospect group, and he has one of the higher ceilings from a point production standpoint. He moves well, and won't need to change his game much as he moves from Europe to North America. He can pass and

shoot at an NHL level, but the ability to impact a game night in and night out has been lacking over the last 18 months.

Commitment to the defensive side of the puck will help the young winger to move through the system more quickly, but it isn't going to be Bokk's calling card as a player. The deployment in which he will be most impactful will be with other skilled players both at even strength and with the man advantage.

I wouldn't be surprised to see Carolina try and get Bokk into the AHL as quickly as possible. He isn't getting great deployment with Djurgardens, and after two consecutive seasons of declining production, it might be best to get a closer look where they can more closely control his minutes. Still plenty of upside here, but the impact might not be as immediate as many fans would have hoped following the trade.

Carolina Hurricanes top 25 under 25 # 12: Jamieson Rees

As our series continues, we profile a recent second-round pick.

By kleblanchockey

It's disappointing that the OHL delayed its season start this week, because watching Rees daily would have been one of the highlights of following the Carolina prospect pool. Last season, the former second-round pick had a breakout season offensively for Sarnia jumping from under a point-per-game in his draft year to 1.56 in 2019-20.

Rees should be one of the top scorers in the league during this campaign, assuming that they can move forward with the season at some point due to Ontario's COVID restrictions. Unfortunately, he was one of the final cuts for a stacked Team Canada at this year's World Juniors and would have been a easy fit into the team's bottom six.

Offensively, Rees continues to round out his game. He's a relentless worker who skates well, and has energy to burn.

He's skillful, using both his speed and hands to beat defenders in one-one-one situations and drive the net. Rees' willingness to drive possession opens up a ton of space for his linemates, making whoever he plays with more dangerous.

Because of his physical game, Rees opens himself up to both injury risk and suspension risk. He has struggled with both over the course of his junior career, missing games for lengthy suspensions and serious injury. You never want to completely turn down the type of motor that Rees has, but as he learns to control what he brings physically, he will be a more effective player.

Rees has a skillset that is unique when it comes to Carolina's prospect pool. Although they have many players who can score in the system, they don't have a player who plays with the edge and skill that Rees does. He will likely follow the standard path of OHL to eventual NHL playing time. Rees is likely a middle-six forward in the future, and one of your favorite players to watch night in and night out.



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Carolina Hurricanes top 25 under 25: #13, Patrik Puistola

We continue our series today with a look at yet another promising Finnish prospect.

By kleblanchockey

Selected with Carolina's first of three third-round picks (73rd overall) in 2019, Puistola was lauded by many around the industry as a solid value pick for a player who slid down the board a bit on the second day of the draft. In his draft year, Puistola averaged over a point per game as a 17-year-old in the Mestis, Finland's version of the AHL after receiving his first taste of Liiga, playing 16 games for a loaded Tappara team.

Last season, he played his first full season in Liiga, splitting time between three different organizations and posting 12 points in 45 games. In just 19 games this season, Puistola has six points, on pace to pass his totals from a year ago, but has still lacked some of the night in, night out consistency that is necessary to take the next step in his development.

Internationally, the young winger has averaged over a point-per-game at the U-17, U-18, and U-20 levels, including eight points in seven games at last year's World Juniors, so it was puzzling that he was left off this year's roster as the team's leading goal scorer and eligible returnee.

As a skilled offensive threat, Puistola should continue to show up more on the scoresheet over the next couple of seasons. JYP has a strong group of young players who should continue to grow together as a talented core, including Carolina draftee Anttoni Honka, Samuel Helenius (2021 Eligible) and Brad Lambert (2022 Eligible) who at 17 could be one of the top names off the board in his draft year.

Puistola needs to continue to improve his skating, which is the biggest developmental flaw in his game at this point. Whether his skating will improve to the point where he can win one-on-one battles as he continues to move up competition levels, will likely control how high his ceiling will be as a prospect. Defensively, he is capable and willing, but he will be known for the offensive side of the puck.

He should be able to make the AHL jump in a couple seasons, but unlike in the past with the Hurricanes' organization, there is no pressure to fast-track players through their development to fill holes in a depleted roster. Carolina has a wealth of wingers who have been added to their system in recent drafts, with top players like Dominik Bokk and Seth Jarvis leading the way. Puistola is a nice piece that represents the second tier of those wingers, and he should provide solid depth with a high ceiling as he moves through the organization.

Hurricanes announce 2021 regular-season schedule

The Hurricanes will kick off the regular season in Detroit.

By Andrew Schnittker

The Hurricanes have known their opponents and length of schedule (56) games since the NHL officially announced its return to play over the weekend. Now, with the league releasing its full schedule today, they know the date and location for every one of those games.

Carolina will play the entirety of its regular-season slate against its new Central Division foes, the Detroit Red Wings, Nashville Predators, Florida Panthers, Columbus Blue Jackets, Tampa Bay Lightning, Dallas Stars and Chicago Blackhawks.

The Hurricanes will start this regular season where they ended before the pause, with a road game against the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday, Jan. 14. The team will open with four on the road, two games at Detroit and two at Nashville.

While the team won't have fans in attendance to start the season, Carolina will open at home against Florida on Jan. 21. That will kick off a six-game homestand that will include two games apiece against Florida, Tampa Bay and Dallas.

It's interesting to note when looking at the schedule, that, aside from a few standalone games, most of the schedule features sets of two games apiece against the same team in the same location, likely in order to minimize travel amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Hurricanes' first seven "series" will be against the seven different teams in the division; they will have faced every opponent by Feb. 7.

The Hurricanes will spend almost the entire month of February on the road, with nine of 12 games coming away from PNC Arena. They'll make up for that in the back half of their schedule, with 19 of their 33 games from March through the first week of May coming at home. That could be to the Hurricanes' benefit if conditions with the virus and distribution of vaccines through the first half of the season allows for limited fan attendance later on.

The Hurricanes will close out the regular season at Nashville on Saturday, May 8.

Here's some other interesting notes from the schedule:

- The Hurricanes' longest road trip of the season will be six games, which they'll do twice, with games at Chicago, Columbus and Dallas from Feb. 2-13 and Tampa Bay, Florida and Dallas from April 19-27.
- The Hurricanes' longest homestand will come in early April, with eight consecutive games against the Stars, Panthers, Red Wings and Predators at PNC Arena.
- The only true "home and home" that will involve more than two straight games against the same team is a stretch of four straight games against the Blue Jackets in eight days March 14-20.
- There is not a single Wednesday game on this schedule. Every other day of the week is represented.



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Hurricanes 2021 Stadium Series game postponed

The pandemic claims another event.

By Brian LeBlanc

The Carolina Hurricanes announced on Wednesday that the 2021 Stadium Series game, scheduled for February 20 at Carter-Finley Stadium, has been postponed on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While we are extremely disappointed that we will not be able to host an outdoor game this season, the health and safety of our fans remains our top priority," Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We look

forward to hosting the game in the near future and rewarding our incredible fanbase with an unforgettable experience."

The state of North Carolina currently allows large event venues to operate at 7% capacity, which would limit attendance at Carter-Finley to slightly more than 4,000. The Hurricanes were one of the teams that had explored hosting regular-season games outdoors, according to Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, but determined that it would not be cost-effective.

The opponent for the Stadium Series game had not been announced. No future date was given for the event, although the game will be rescheduled.

Carolina Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25: #14 Joey Keane

The recently acquired 21-year-old defenseman who was an AHL All-Star and named to the AHL All-Rookie Team

By Zeke Lukow

Editor's note: Introducing Canes Country's top 25 under 25 series. Last week, a group of us set out to rank the top 25 players 25 years of age or younger in the Hurricanes' organization. We were successful in that endeavor. We took into account what players have accomplished to date, their likelihood of making it as a regular NHLer, and the level of impact they're likely to have.

On this list, you'll find players currently on the Hurricanes' roster and prospects scattered across the AHL, Canadian junior leagues, and Europe. We'll be revealing one player each weekday (with a couple exceptions for holidays) from now through early January.

We continue today with a reigning AHL All-Star and All-Rookie team defenseman.

Joey Keane was acquired by the Carolina Hurricanes on Feb. 8 in exchange for Julien Gauthier. Keane was originally drafted by the New York Rangers with the 88th overall pick in the 2018 NHL draft. At the time the trade seemed a little weird since the Canes were already deep at defenseman and thinner with forwards, but they couldn't say no to that kind of return.

Before breaking into the professional ranks, he spent three seasons with the Barrie Colts and one year with the London Knights. While in Barrie he played with fellow Carolina Hurricane Andrei Svechnikov during the 2017-2018 season. In his draft year, he had his best season in juniors with 11 goals and 32 assists for 44 total points. His production fell off in the following season before transitioning to the professional ranks.

This past season was Keane's first as a professional and was his best yet. Keane led all rookie defensemen in goals with

nine and ranked second in the AHL in rookie defensemen in points with 37. Normally the jump from juniors to the pros can be difficult and even more so for a defenseman, but not only did Keane play well, he improved his point production per game from the juniors to the AHL. In his last season in the OHL, he had eight goals, and in the AHL he had nine.

His first goal came in the Wolfpack's opening game against Charlotte. He showed his willingness to get involved on offense by crashing down open ice to a goal-scoring position. Sure there is a lot of open space for him to move into, but if he doesn't put the shot on goal it could lead to an odd-man rush with just one player back playing defense.

He also fits in well with the Hurricanes' system that allows defensemen to carry the puck and drive breakouts. In that goal, he was comfortable enough with his skating and puck skills to find a small gap in the defense and he manages to score. Granted it's against an AHL goalie, but he still showed the ability to not only lead the rush but to finish it himself.

His 38 assists also mean that he is a good facilitator of the puck and can find open players when he has the puck on his stick. Like all defensemen looking to make the NHL, he will have to work on his defense. He did register a -6 rating on the season which matches Jake Bean, who is two years his elder. Keane has shown the offensive eye and the ability to skate, but as we all know, defensemen have to be defense first with Rod Brind'Amour before he will allow them to wheel in the offensive zone.

Keane's biggest hurdle moving forward is the Carolina Hurricanes organization being stacked with defensemen. Even with this and all of the skill on the blue line, He ranked second on the Checkers when it came to defenseman scoring, only behind AHL defenseman of the year Jake Bean. It will be tough for him to make the NHL or a taxi squad type role with the Canes who prefer to mature defensemen in the AHL for longer, but he could impress in camp when it opens.



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Taking a look at potential Canes' taxi squad members

With a taxi squad being added to the NHL structure for 2021, we take a look at which players in Carolina's organization may be in that group.

By Alec_Sawyer

There are a lot of changes in the NHL's format for the upcoming 2021 season, which will (hopefully) drop the puck on Jan. 13.

There will be fewer games than normal and new divisions for every NHL squad, and there will also be a help to the roster in the form of a four- to six-man taxi squad.

The taxi squad players will be paid their full AHL salaries (or NHL salaries if not a two-way player), and they won't have a cap hit on the NHL team while on the taxi squad. The downside for the taxi squad players is that they won't be able to participate in any AHL activities, but the good news is they can practice with the NHL team the whole season.

When a player from the taxi squad is needed for a game, they must be called up to the NHL team before 5 p.m. EST (with an exception for a taxi squad goalie if the NHL team will not have two goalies available).

The taxi squad players can but are not required to travel with the team, with one exception. Each taxi squad must contain a goaltender if the NHL team has less than three goalies on the active roster, and that extra goalie must travel with the team.

With all that in mind, let's take a look at which players may make up the Hurricanes taxi squad:

Alex Nedeljkovic

The Canes will have to carry a taxi squad goalie with only Petr Mrazek and James Reimer on the active roster, and Nedeljkovic is the obvious pick here. Jeremy Helvig and Antoine Bibeau are the other goalies to pick from, but Nedeljkovic already has more NHL experience and is the better prospect.

Nedeljkovic, who has played in six games for the Canes over the past four years, played four times last year after injuries to Mrazek and Reimer. Getting the opportunity to practice full time with the NHL squad could be a good opportunity for Nedeljkovic, and in the situation where he's needed the Hurricanes know they can trust him some.

Jake Bean

Carolina's first-round pick back in 2016, Bean has just two career NHL games under his belt. In the 2018-19 season with the Charlotte Checkers, Bean had 44 points and followed that up with 48 points in just 59 games for the Checkers last year.

Bean is one of, if not the best of Carolina's prospects, and he's probably someone the Canes will want to keep around. There's a chance that Bean could be rostered instead of being put on the taxi squad, but if he's not on the active roster he'll certainly be in the taxi group.

Bean was one of three players mentioned by SportsNet's Elliot Friedman as a player the Canes are interested in bringing on the taxi squad.

Joey Keane

Another defenseman, Keane came to the Hurricanes last year in an exchange for Julien Gauthier. He didn't play for Carolina at all, but he did have seven points in nine games for the Checkers.

Assuming the Canes will want to keep a couple defenseman on the taxi squad, Keane is a decent bet to be on the taxi squad regardless of whether or not Bean has a staying place on the active roster.

Like Bean, Keane was mentioned by Friedman as someone the Canes are considering having on the taxi squad.

Roland McKeown

The Hurricanes re-signed McKeown to a two-way deal last week. McKeown has been with Carolina's franchise for six years, playing 10 games for the NHL squad in the 2017-18 season.

McKeown is a good depth blue liner for the Canes, and he'd definitely be a guy worth having on that taxi squad. While limited, he does have some NHL experience to his name.

Dominik Bokk

Bokk is one of the Hurricanes' top prospects, and if Carolina wants to use the taxi squad as an opportunity to help develop players than he will likely come along.

Like Bean and Keane, Friedman mentioned Bokk's name as one the Hurricanes are considering bringing up, and it makes a lot of sense to let him get that much time practicing with NHL talent around him.

While he might not be quite ready to hit the ice in the NHL, he's a good candidate to be on the taxi squad.

Ryan Suzuki

The Canes' first-round pick in 2019, Suzuki is one of Carolina's top forward prospects. He doesn't have NHL or AHL experience, but practicing on the taxi squad could be a huge boost for his development.

As mentioned with Bokk, if the Hurricanes are looking to use the taxi squad as an asset to develop players, then Suzuki could be a really good choice to be among that group.

Clark Bishop

Bishop has the benefit of some NHL experience, with 25 games under his belt with the Hurricanes. If the intended purpose of the taxi squad is to have players available to jump onto the NHL roster if COVID hits, then having someone who has played at the NHL level will be important.

Bishop has that, and he's someone that the Hurricanes wouldn't have to hesitate about calling up if he's needed.

Wrapping Up

The big thing to look out for with the taxi squad will be how the Canes are looking to use it.

In a year where nothing is guaranteed with the AHL, letting top prospects practice with the NHL team on the taxi squad could



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be a huge benefit for teams. If that's the route the Canes go, expect guys like Bean, Suzuki and Bokk to be on the list.

If an AHL season does happen and the Hurricanes feel like it would benefit the prospects more to play there, than the taxi squad will look a lot different.

Hurricanes preparing for start of 2021 season

With the NHL's return officially set for Jan. 13, Rod Brind'Amour, Jordan Staal and Don Waddell spoke to the media Monday with an update on their preparations.

By Andrew Schnittker

After months of waiting and wondering, hockey is right around the corner. Following this weekend's official announcement that the league will play a 56-game schedule with a Jan. 13, 2021 start date, the Hurricanes suddenly find themselves quickly preparing for a new season.

It will unfortunately be without fans in the building at least as the season begins, but hockey will return to PNC Arena in under a month.

As the team prepares for its truncated 2021 season, head coach Rod Brind'Amour, general manager Don Waddell and captain Jordan Staal spoke with the media via Zoom Monday. Here's some key updates from their availability:

Training camp and condensed schedule

Training camp for the new season will begin Jan. 3, as a very quick lead in to the new season. The Hurricanes will spend the majority of their training camp at the new Wake Competition Center practice facility, partly due to availability conflicts with NC State men's basketball home games at PNC Arena.

Without a normal training camp, teams will have to be able to ramp up to full speed quickly, and each game will take on added importance in a shortened year.

"I think it's going to be a challenge, kind of like going into the bubble," Staal said. "It's going to be a quick training camp, I don't think there's any exhibition. With a shortened season, every game is just going to be that much more heightened. It's just one of those things that everyone's got to be prepared right away, and our group's got to get quickly, find a way to get hot early and continue to stay hot. With a short season, you've got to string together some games if you want to make that push to the playoffs."

With a truncated camp, it will be to the Hurricanes' benefit that they largely return the same group as last season, with the core untouched and Jesper Fast the only major addition to the NHL team.

"I think with this group, what we've learned last year from it, I think you definitely want to make sure we take that experience," Brind'Amour said. "Playing in front of no fans for the first time, that's an adjustment. Well, now they've kind of got that in check. Really, I think with the same group being back is that motivation. It didn't end the way we wanted it to end. I think that's the fuel here, the fire to say 'OK, we've got to be better than that.' We don't want to end like that, so that's what's great about having the same group back, they suffered

Nedeljkovic feels like the only sure thing with the requirement to bring along a third goalie.

here, they went through that together. We want better things, and I think that's what you're going to see out of these guys."

New foes

As part of the league's realignment with the seven Canadian teams having to form one division due to travel issues, the Hurricanes moved to a new central division. They'll only keep one of their old Metropolitan Division Rivals, the Columbus Blue Jackets, and will square off eight times each against Columbus, the Tampa Bay Lightning, Florida Panthers, Dallas Stars, Nashville Predators, Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks.

Most of the teams are opponents the Hurricanes normally only play twice a year, and playing each of them eight times could spawn some new rivalries.

"I think it's interesting," Staal said. "It's mostly teams we haven't played a ton, so that'll make it different. It's obviously weird that we're going to play those same teams the whole year, which I think is going to maybe cause some quick rivalries and obviously some good games. But it is what it is. We're happy we're getting going, we're happy we're playing some hockey. We're excited to be back, and whoever we're lining up against, we're just excited to play some hockey."

Clean bill of health

Waddell said that, with two additional players arriving Monday, the Hurricanes now have all of their NHL players in Raleigh, and "100% ready to roll" with everyone healthy.

That means that defenseman Brett Pesce, who has not played in a game for the Hurricanes since suffering a shoulder injury in late February, should be ready to rejoin the group.

Taxi squad

One of the adjustments the league will make for this season in the time of COVID-19 is the addition of a "taxi squad."

Teams can carry a minimum of four and maximum of six players, according to Waddell. If a team doesn't have three goalies on its active roster, one of the players on the taxi squad must be a goalie, as each team must carry three goalies at all times (there will be no emergency goalies this season). The entire taxi squad doesn't have to travel to road games with its team, but the goalie does.

If the AHL plays this season, players will not be able to be recalled directly from the AHL to the NHL roster. Players can be recalled from the AHL to the NHL taxi squad, but they must pass a 14-day quarantine before reporting.

No outdoor games

Waddell said the Hurricanes were one of the teams that spoke to the league about possibly playing some outdoor games in this season, but that it didn't make financial sense with current



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restrictions on fans, so the team likely won't play any outdoor games during the 2021 season.

No update on extensions

Waddell also said that while he did not have any update on potential contract extensions for Dougie Hamilton and Andrei Svechnikov, who will both be free agents after the 2021 season (Hamilton will be unrestricted, Svechnikov will be restricted), he's told both players' agents the Hurricanes have interest in extensions and expects talks to continue.

Ready to play

There are obviously financial concerns about playing a shortened season with limited to, in the Hurricanes' case, at least to start the season, no fans.

There are ways to offset the losses, and Waddell confirmed the Hurricanes are looking at placing advertisement decals on their home and away helmets this season, but the losses won't be insignificant. Still, Waddell knows it was important for the league to get back on the ice.

"We need to play," Waddell said. "I think to go out of sight for a whole year probably doesn't make a whole lot of sense. We are who we are. We're the NHL. Obviously we're not the NFL.

2020 Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25: #15, Jack Drury

Rather than lose a season of development due to Harvard's cancelled season, Drury headed to Sweden for the year.

By Sarah.A

With hockey at a standstill entirely in North America, young players have been forced to make some hard choices about the 2020-21 season. Do you wait it out in Canada or the United States, pinning your hopes on your season actually starting, or of actually playing any meaningful games at all? Or do you take the chance and go to Europe, where the pandemic situation is at least marginally more under control — at least, under control enough for sports leagues to resume play, even if it is to largely empty arenas.

Jack Drury, who played two years at Harvard, found himself thrust into that position when the Ivy League schools collectively announced that they were cancelling winter sports for 2020-21, after initially planning on a delayed start to the year. Left without a team to play on at a crucial time in his development, Drury made the decision to leave college in favor of heading to Europe, signing with the SHL's Växjö Lakers for the season. The Hurricanes retain Drury's rights.

In his two seasons at Harvard, Drury collected a handful of accolades for himself, leading the team in power play goals in his freshman season and leading in overall goals the following year. He's already shown that he can handle the level of play in the NCAA, emerging as one of the top defensive forwards in his conference. While Drury may not have been quite ready to go the professional route, the situation created by the pandemic forced his hand.

I think we need to be in front of our fans. Our fans, they miss that."

There were reports that some NHL owners didn't want to play the season under those circumstances.

Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon wasn't one of them.

"Tom, from the onset, always wanted to play," Waddell said. "He never second guessed that at all. He's been totally supportive of us, for all the reasons I said, to get back and play. We were 100% on board."

From the players' perspective, they know this year will look different, and COVID will likely place added rules and regulations on their day-to-day activities.

However, the Hurricanes view that as a small price to pay to get back in action.

"There's going to be some sacrifices," Staal said. "Everyone's made sacrifices at this time. These are small sacrifices for us to be able to play a game and hopefully entertain a group of people that are longing to watch some hockey. That's what we want to do, and it's going to be different. There's going to be little things here and there. But in the end, being able to be out on the ice and compete against the best players in the world is what we all want. I think that's what the fans want, too."

In terms of Drury's skills on the ice, he presents as a little bit of the best of both worlds: a player with a strong offensive drive who already had a very well-developed two-way game even prior to beginning college. In many of the young players we've profiled so far in this series, we've seen issues with defense and consistency, both fairly common in prospects. But Drury already has a strong foundation in his all-around play.

He's more of a playmaker than a goal scorer, though of course he shows talent for that, too. His awareness of his teammates and the plays developing on the ice is already excellent and will only get better with more experience. Drury played in all situations for Harvard; his defensive skills will be a huge asset to him in his hopes of making the NHL eventually.

Playing in the SHL is a solid next step for Drury, as he now gets to hone his skills playing with and against older, more experienced men. Drury has a respectable 16 points in 23 games, averaging a time on ice of 18:08, which is among the highest of the forwards on the team.

For many players, making the jump from college or juniors to the AHL comes with an adjustment period as they get used to the increased pace, physicality and skill at the next level. Drury now has the luxury of being able to continue his development in a league that will push him to be a better hockey player. The Hurricanes benefit too, as they get to see how Drury handles this level of play. They will most likely end up with a much better picture of the kind of player they're getting as they're evaluating him against players with more significant experience.



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NHL to begin 2020-21 season January 13; Hurricanes to play in reconfigured Central Division

In less than a month, hockey will return to PNC Arena.

By Brian LeBlanc

Update: The news is now official. The Hurricanes will play in the Central Division, and games will take place only within divisions (so no influxes, such as they would be given capacity restrictions, of Penguins or Rangers fans this season!). The release from the NHL and NHLPA is below. Our original story follows.

According to reports from all the usual sources, the 2020-21 NHL season will begin January 13, ten months to the day since the COVID-19 pandemic paused the 2019-20 regular season, after the NHL and NHLPA reached an agreement Friday night. The news was first reported by Pierre LeBrun of The Athletic and Elliotte Friedman of Sportsnet.

Update: Sunday morning, the usual suspects started tweeting out critical dates for the 2020-21 season:

- Season start: January 13
- Trade deadline: April 12
- End of regular season: May 8
- Latest date for Stanley Cup Final: July 15
- Expansion draft: July 21
- 2021 NHL Draft: July 23-24
- Start of free agency: July 28

There will be 116 days of the regular season, which with 56 games scheduled averages out to a game every 2.07 days. While the schedule will certainly be compressed, there shouldn't be any runs of 5 games in a week or three games in a row.

The schedule also gives the NHL the chance to finish the playoffs before the start of the Tokyo Olympics, which begin July 23. The 2021 off-season will be about a month shorter than standard, but this schedule puts the NHL in a position to begin the 2021-22 season on time or close to it, which is important since 2022 is an Olympic year and the league will need to plan for a few weeks off during that season to accommodate.

As had been predicted, LeBrun reports that the season will comprise 56 games, and Renaud P. Lavoie of TVA Sports adds that the division of all-Canadian teams is expected to come to fruition. It had been reported earlier this week that the division was in danger of not being allowed to play in Canada, and the NHL continues to consider contingency plans to allow teams to play, either by moving teams to the United States in

the way the Toronto Raptors (Tampa) and Blue Jays (Buffalo) have done, or perhaps by putting all seven Canadian teams in a bubble in Edmonton. Frank Seravalli of TSN reports that the NHL continues discussions with Canadian provincial and federal government authorities to determine a way forward.

Training camp, according to Seravalli, will begin January 3, with the seven teams that did not participate in the August return to play allowed to begin camp on December 31. Rod Brind'Amour had told Canes Country in an interview last month that he thought teams could get ready to go with a training camp of a week and no preseason games, and it seems like we will see nearly that exact scenario play out.

Seravalli also reports that each team will be allowed to carry a "taxi squad" of between four and six AHL players who will travel and practice with the NHL squad. Those players will be paid their AHL salary, according to Seravalli, and the collective bargaining agreement is being tweaked to allow for easy recalls and to account for their presence on the NHL club outside the bounds of the salary cap, which will remain at \$81.5 million.

Additionally, Seravalli further reports that players who are themselves at high risk of contracting COVID-19 or have high-risk family members will have the option to opt out of the season. Unlike in the return to play in August, though, any player who opts out of the season will not be paid. Clubs will have the option of tolling the contract year, essentially sliding the remainder of the contract forward one year, of players who opt out.

With the plan for the Canadian teams still unresolved, the NHL has not committed to divisional alignments. The most recent expectation was that the Carolina Hurricanes would be in a division with the Florida teams, the Detroit Red Wings, the Columbus Blue Jackets and three teams from the Central Division; Michael Russo of The Athletic reports that the Dallas Stars are expected to be one of those teams, along with the previously reported Blackhawks and Predators.

Without the divisions in place, a schedule is still pending, although it seems likely that teams will only play other teams within their division this year, giving the Hurricanes eight games apiece against the other seven teams. Friedman reports that the 16-team Stanley Cup Playoffs will be contested by the top four teams in each division, with no wild cards or crossovers.

Approvals are still required by the NHLPA, which has an executive committee conference call tonight, and by the NHL Board of Governors, which will convene an emergency meeting this weekend to discuss the potential agreement. This post will be updated as necessary with new developments.



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Hurricanes sign Roland McKeown to one-year deal

The Hurricanes have reupped with a key piece of defensive depth for the 2020-21 season.

By Andrew Schnittker

The Hurricanes have taken care of one of their final internal free agents for this offseason, signing defenseman Roland McKeown to a one-year, two-way deal. The deal will pay him \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$100,000 at the AHL level for the 2020-21 season.

McKeown came to the Hurricanes as part of the return for defenseman Andrej Sekera at the 2015 trade deadline and has spent six seasons with the organization. McKeown posted four goals and 24 points in 61 games last season for the Charlotte Checkers, serving as the team's captain.

With uncertainty about when the AHL season might start, McKeown has been loaned to Skelleftea AIK of the Swedish Hockey League. He would likely play a key role either in the AHL with the Chicago Wolves or on any possible Hurricanes "taxi squad" when the 2020-21 season begins.

Top 25 Under 25: #16, Vasilii Ponomarev

The Russian centerman is a machine on the ice and that coupled with his familiarity with North American ice may help increase his odds of making it to the NHL.

By Ryan Henkel

One of the newest faces in the Carolina Hurricanes organization, Ponomarev was drafted in the second round of the 2020 NHL Entry Draft, 53rd overall. A touted Russian centerman, Ponomarev plays well in just about every aspect of the game. Offensively or defensively. With or without the puck. On special teams or at 5v5.

While not necessarily elite at any one thing, Ponomarev is closer to being a complete player than most prospects, which boosts him considerably in that regard.

One of the only downsides for Ponomarev is his size. At 5'11" and 176 pounds, Ponomarev isn't the largest prospect, especially for two-way center, but at only 18, he still has plenty of time to fill out his body.

While you can say many players play a 200-foot game or are two-way players, Ponomarev takes it further with his relentless work ethic and determination both in forechecking and backchecking and in every zone on the ice. This attitude combined with his high hockey sense and skills are what make him that complete package.

Another plus is that Ponomarev is already familiar with North American ice. He is currently in his second season with the

Shawinigan Cataractes in the QMJHL — where he put up 18 goals and 49 points in 57 games in his first season and is currently a point per game player this season.

In the Q, Ponomarev has spent time on both the second and first lines, producing consistently and this year has also given him the opportunity to step into a leadership role, wearing the "A" in Shawinigan.

Ponomarev will be representing Team Russia in the upcoming World Junior Championships which will be a good opportunity for him to continue to showcase his skills in a role in the middle six. His relentless work ethic and overbearing backchecking may play a big role in the tournament, that traditionally sees more offensive showcasing.

Ponomarev signed his ELC a few months after being drafted, perhaps a precaution for him avoiding signing to a team in the KHL, but it also shows the potential excitement around him in the organization. His current game seems like it will be the perfect translation to the current one Rod Brind'Amour has established in Carolina and he could become one of the most promising prospect candidates in the next few years.

While not as high of a ceiling as some of the other players in the system — for instance Ponomarev seems like he will be a middle-six center at best in the NHL — he has a much higher projected floor due to his work ethic, complete game and already familiarity with North American ice and that lower risk raises him in this ranking.

2020 Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25: #17 Anttoni Honka

An undersized defenseman with NHL experience in the family, Honka is performing well in Finland and has a high ceiling once he eventually comes to North America.

By kleblanchockey

In 2019, the Carolina Hurricanes picked up a solid crop of mid-round draft picks highlighted by their three third round picks. Anttoni Honka was the second of those three selections, coming off the board 83rd between fellow Finn Patrik Puustola and fellow defenseman Dominick Fensore.

At just 20 years old, Honka has already played 109 games in Liiga, Finland's top league, posting 43 points in that time. He currently leads JYP defensemen in scoring early in the 2020-21 season with seven points in 19 games, and is tied for the

team lead with six assists. His offensive ability is by far the strength of his game, but it's promising to see the third rounder taking on as much of a scoring role as he has in just his second full season facing top competition. In some ways he has picked up where his brother Julius Honka, who spent last season with JYP while in a contract dispute with the Dallas Stars, left off.

Although undersized at 5-foot-10, Anttoni Honka is a positive possession player who uses his skating and puck handling ability to drive offense. He is aggressive in puck retrieval, and has the ability to both skate and pass his way out of trouble. He continues to develop as a strong player both in the neutral and offensive zones and processes the game as a faster level



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than many of his peers. Honka will be a power play producer with the ability to both facilitate and score from the point.

Defensively, Honka does have room to improve, but his deployment will likely skew towards a lower-six role in favorable offensive situations at the AHL level and the eventual NHL level. Most importantly, he will need to continue to improve away from the puck, and become stronger in one-on-one situations to stick long term.

Honka is still years away from the NHL, but he should make the move to the AHL in the next couple seasons. In Finland, the young blueliner is getting plenty of opportunity, so his move to North America isn't as imperative as some of the other European based players within the prospect group. However, integrating Honka into the Hurricanes organizational structure at the AHL level will certainly benefit his development. He's a promising prospect with a high ceiling who should fit well in the Hurricanes system.

2020 Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25: #18, Noel Gunler

Gunler is another high risk, high reward prospects with a strong shot and hockey IQ.

By Sarah.A

The Hurricanes have shown a trend of using draft picks on high risk, high reward players, and Swedish winger Noel Gunler is no exception. Gunler was projected to go in the late first round of the 2020 NHL Draft, but concerns about his consistency and overall maturity caused him to slip down the draft board. If he manages to overcome those concerns, though, Gunler could be one of the biggest steals of the draft.

The first thing you'll notice about Gunler's game is his shot. The shot is quick and accurate, giving opposing players little time to react to him. Even at times where his shot is easy to read, his puck placement is so dead-on that goalies struggle to stop him. He's dangerous from all areas of the ice and doesn't overly rely on any one type of shot to find success.

Gunler's shot has been compared to fellow Swede Alexander Holtz, who was selected seventh overall in this year's draft. Holtz may have the more complete game at this stage in his development, but with increased opportunities in the SHL, Gunler has the potential to work out any issues in his game long before he heads to North America.

Gunler also does well in terms of playmaking, both in knowing where his teammates are going to be on the ice and in finding open ice for himself. He reads plays well, making choices in terms of breakouts and zone entries that are always a step ahead of other players his age.

Gunler came up as a teenager through Luleå's development system, where he really came into his own at the U20 level. He got his first taste of the SHL in the 2018-19 season, holding

his own among men for 15 games. His ice time had consistently been limited with Luleå in the SHL, however, never breaking ten minutes of average time on ice over any of the three seasons where he played in the SHL. Some of Gunler's developmental struggles could be attributed to the lack of exposure to meaningful minutes at the professional level.

In November, Gunler was traded to Brynas and immediately saw his ice time increase. He went from an average of 7:12 over ten games with Luleå to 13:23 in eight games with Brynas. Gunler was also selected for Sweden's World Juniors roster after being passed over last year. He's expected to play a top-six role for Sweden in the competition, which will be the first time Hurricanes fans will be able to easily see him in action.

Like many young players, some issues around attitude, consistency, and commitment to defense have followed Gunler throughout the past two years. The attitude issues seem to have been blown out of proportion, however, and Gunler is probably unfairly dogged by the matter. Consistency is another trait that will come with age and experience; he's not the first young player to need some time to learn that he can't cheat on a play or take a shift off. And while he may not ever develop into a strong two-way player, his offense could do much to make that less of a concern.

His game as it stands now isn't suited to a more defense-heavy, checking role, so a role on a more offense-oriented line would need to open up for him to be best positioned for success. With proper development and increased opportunities to improve his game, Gunler could develop into a middle-six forward in the NHL, potentially with the ability to play up in the lineup when necessary.

2020 Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25: #19 Pyotr Kochetkov

Goalies are nearly impossible to project, but the Hurricanes feel they grabbed a solid future netminder in the second round of last year's draft.

By kleblanchockey

Editor's note: Today in Canes Country's top 25 under 25 series, we look at one of Carolina's top prospects between the pipes.

Predicting the future goaltending success of 17 to 19-year-olds is a dangerous game. It's why it's so rare that goaltenders are selected in the first round of the NHL Draft each year, and why it's such a bonus when you hit on a homegrown talent in

net. Arguably hockey's most important position is also the hardest to project long-term.

Given the inherent risk in drafting goaltenders, a popular place to see the position start to come off the board is the beginning to middle of the second round. Teams regularly trade for second rounders, and as an easily stockpiled asset, it's less painful to stomach the risk that comes with the global positional development. This is exactly the scenario that led the Hurricanes to select Pyotr Kochetkov early in the second round of the 2019 NHL Draft, with a pick received from Buffalo in the Jeff Skinner trade.

Kochetkov is further along on his development timeline than most of his peers drafted in 2019 because he was selected as



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an overager following his terrific showing at the World Juniors in Vancouver that January. He wasn't highly scouted prior to the 2019 season due to the obscurity that exists in some corners of the Russian hockey landscape, but his top goaltender performance in a bronze medal-winning tournament cemented his draft status as one of the top players at his position and a viable NHL prospect.

Opportunity is something that has been lacking for Kotchetkov since hearing his name called on draft night. As a 20-year-old goaltender, the chance that the young Russian was going to get meaningful opportunities in the net for SKA St Petersburg, one of the KHL's deepest organizations, was slim. Although he played well when called upon, Kotchetkov was moved from SKA to Vityaz Podolsk seemingly for more time in net.

Unfortunately, that hasn't helped. Since the trade he has been stuck behind behind 10-year veteran Ilya Yezhov with Podolsk in a league where coaches tend to lean on veterans over young players. Yezhov is 33, so Kotchetkov's time will come, but he has had to drop down to the VHL (Russian AHL) level

Top 25 Under 25: #20, Jesper Sellgren

The Swedish defender has spent the past two seasons on European ice and that trend will continue this year too. Will he be able to make the transition?

By Ryan Henkel

Editor's note: Introducing Canes Country's top 25 under 25 series. Last week, a group of us set out to rank the top 25 players 25 years of age or younger in the Hurricanes' organization. We were successful in that endeavor. We took into account what players have accomplished to date, their likelihood of making it as a regular NHLer and the level of impact they're likely to have.

On this list, you'll find players currently on the Hurricanes' roster and prospects scattered across the AHL, Canadian junior leagues and Europe. We'll be revealing one player each week day (with a couple exceptions for holidays) from now through early January.

We continue today with a late-round pick who has been outgrowing his current league:

Sellgren was a 2018, sixth-round pick — 166 overall — selected out of the Swedish SHL. A strong transitional skater, Sellgren has good two-way upside being both a play driver and a reliable defender.

He has been a steady producer in the SHL where, in three seasons, he has 12 goals and 34 points in 123 games.

In his current season, Sellgren leads his club in average ice time (21:11), blocks (23) and points by defensemen (10) while also being a top power play option.

Although he signed a three-year ELC with the Canes in 2019, Sellgren, however, will not have played a single season on North American ice yet.

He wound up returning to the SHL for the 2019-20 season, and while he had a solid chance of being a big contributor in

this season to get a couple more games. After playing 18 games across three divisions a year ago, Kotchekov has played just six games between the KHL and VHL so far this year.

There is still plenty of reason to be excited about the thought of Kotchekov in a Hurricanes uniform down the road, and there is still some value in the unknown (good and bad), especially when discussing rankings of prospects. He is still the athletic, toolsy netminder that took the international stage by storm just two seasons ago, and who the Hurricanes organization was happy to scoop up 36th overall in 2019.

Surely, Carolina would love to see their potential future starter have a more concrete path to playing time, and they may have to get him on North American soil to guarantee it. More developmental opportunity is necessary if he is to make an impact down the road, but those opportunities should come over the next couple of seasons.

the AHL this year, the league restart delays meant that he was loaned back to the SHL for the entire 2020-21 season.

This means that already, two years on his ELC will have been burned with very little North American experience to show for it.

That little experience was quite strong though, as he did join the Charlotte Checkers on a PTO during their Calder Cup playoff run when his 2018-19 SHL season ended. In that time, he registered three goals — including one in his first game — and four points in 11 playoff games.

The biggest issue for Sellgren has simply been the complete lack of opportunity in Carolina's organization. Not only is the NHL club stocked with some of the best defensive talent in hockey, but any chance for standing out in the AHL will more than likely have been overshadowed by last year's AHL defenseman of the year, Jake Bean, or the newly acquired and recent AHL All-Rookie Team member, Joey Keane.

Sellgren may see an opportunity arise as the salary cap remains stagnant for at least another season or two where young, inexpensive talent is a commodity. Whether that be with Carolina or as a bargaining chip that can be brought to the table.

Currently, I feel that Sellgren has already outgrown the SHL where he currently plays top minutes with Frolunda HC and, for his development's sake, he will need to make the jump to North America next season if he wants to keep his NHL hopes afloat.

Seeing him in person at a few NHL training camps with Carolina so far, has shown that there is plenty of talent there, but it isn't quite enough to pass by the Hurricanes' tremendous depth.

Void any major shakeups in the system, the odds of Sellgren making it with Carolina seem slim. Though I think there is still time to make some bounds in his game, I feel like the question will be with who he can be given a shot.



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SportScan

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

1197363 Carolina Hurricanes

How we'd run the Hurricanes: Finding the right deal for Dougie Hamilton

By The Athletic NHL Staff Dec 27, 2020

As an extension of the NHL Future Power Rankings, which look ahead to how teams will stack up three seasons from now, we are diving into what each team can expect and what moves it can make to produce the best outcome.

The Athletic will break down what each team needs to do to, or should do, to take the next step toward contention. James Mirtle will give advice based on the salary cap situation. Dom Luszczyszyn will dive into the analytics and look at what each team has on his Stanley Cup checklist. Scott Wheeler and Corey Pronman will answer four key questions about the team's prospects. And Eric Duhatschek will propose a game plan for the general manager. Then the local beat writer will put it all in perspective with a reality check.

The Cap Situation

The final year of the Alex Semin buyout (which dates back to 2014-15!) and a bonus overage from last season rob the Hurricanes of \$3.7 million off the top.

That, plus nearly \$30 million spent on the blue line, helps get them right snug against the upper limit.

Having five defensemen making more than \$4 million is a bit unorthodox, although that depth protects them in case of injury. I could see the 'Canes moving someone like Jake Gardiner if they feel like a prospect like Jake Bean is ready to contribute more in the NHL, however.

The good news about Carolina is its skaters are almost all young and they're almost all paid fairly. This final year of Andrei Svechnikov's ELC is going to be a vital one to make some hay given his new deal will bite into 2021-22's finances.

The Hurricanes are going to have a chance to really re-envision their roster next summer if they want to, as there'll be nearly \$30 million in cap space and some big names going UFA, including both goaltenders and Dougie Hamilton, who will be difficult to replace.

This team is close to a contender as is; if it could shed a midsize contract for more help up front and/or an upgrade on Petr Mrazek, that could put it up into the upper echelon of the league. — James Mirtle

The Analytics

The Stanley Cup Checklist is based on research done earlier this year looking at the average value for players at every position from the past 10 Cup champions. It's based on the best-of-the-best each year, making it a high bar to clear and it means no team will have every box checked off, but the more holes a team has filled, the closer it is to being a Cup contender. A name in a specific box means he's in the right ballpark for projected value compared to past Cup winners, with some on the lower end and some on the higher end. Using an age curve, we made note of

what each team already has on their roster signed for each of the next three seasons.

Let's take a look.

I really hope the acquisition of Brady Skjei doesn't hurt the team's chances of re-signing Hamilton, because he's the difference between this team being a Cup contender for years to come or being a team on the playoff bubble. They're close enough now that they only need a few tweaks, but losing Hamilton would be a huge setback. With Svechnikov also needing a new contract and no goalies on the books next year, things might get dicey.

That there's no goalie signed past this year might be a blessing though as it's the one piece this team really needs. Petr Mrazek and James Reimer are fine stop-gap solutions, but they arguably aren't Cup contending goalies. A center behind Sebastian Aho is also needed, but the hope is that Vincent Trocheck bounces back to that level after some rough recent seasons in Florida, or that Martin Necas takes that step. It's possible, but neither are slotted at that level here.

Overall it's hard to quibble too much with Carolina's current path and the team's moves to get there. Get Hamilton locked up, find a goalie and stay the course. That's really it as this team has a solid young core that's capable of contending over the next few seasons. — Dom Luszczyszyn

The Prospect Pipeline

Who is on the verge of getting here?

Forwards Seth Jarvis, Ryan Suzuki, Noel Gunler and Dominik Bokk and defenseman Jake Bean are the team's top prospects. Bean looks on the doorstep after being the best defenseman in the AHL. The forwards look years away though. Jarvis could move the quickest and arrive in one-to-two years but the rest may need a lot of time to develop.

How good will they be when they get here?

Jarvis and Suzuki project as top-six forwards, with Jarvis having the most potential of anyone in the system to be a top-line forward even if not the likely outcome. Gunler and Bokk have top-six talent but they may be bottom-six forwards due to some deficiencies in their games. Bean could be a quality top-four defenseman.

What positions do they play, and do we have excesses or deficiencies?

This is a very deep pipeline at forward. The defense depth is decent but not as impressive as the forwards. There is a lack of a goaltender of the future in the system.

What does our prospect pool tell us about where we are in a competitive cycle?

The Hurricanes have a strong roster with some very good young players already up and some good ones on the way. They don't have true star-caliber talent in the pipeline though. They are a competitive team and have players who will supplement the core and give them cheap production. It also won't solve their goaltending issue. — Corey Pronman

The Game Plan

I have a great deal of admiration for the work GM Don Waddell has done so far — adapting to an owner who believes in disruption, but at the same time, working in a league that gravitates toward low-risk and



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predictable behavior. There's a fine line that needs to be walked here, and Waddell's done an excellent job of straddling it. Two tasks loom, however. One is sorting out what to do with Hamilton, in the final year of a contract that pays him \$5.75 million annually and at 27, presumably looking for a big payday, a la Alex Pietrangelo or someone else in that remuneration ballpark. The Hurricanes are actually a team that could lose a piece as big as Hamilton and survive, because of younger players such as Haydn Fleury and Jake Bean, who are inching their way incrementally up the ladder. If Hamilton's ask is more than owner Tom Dundon wants to pay, then a priority will be maximizing trade value for him, rather than letting him walk away. At some point, they'll also need to sort out the goaltending and specifically whether the 28-year-old Mrazek can get you deep down the playoff road — or if you need an upgrade there. Mrazek and James Reimer were a good combo last year, but both are on expiring contracts. The chance to shop at the Columbus Blue Jacket store for a value buy such as Joonas Korpisalo or Elvis Merzlikins may tempt Waddell at some point. It would tempt me. — Eric Duhatschek

The Reality Check

While I appreciate Eric's sentiment that the Hurricanes could "survive" without Hamilton, I tend to agree with Dom on this one: The Canes need to get him signed.

He paces the team and this is a team that thrives on its active defense. I think the mentality of maximizing trade value then sending them away before they hit free agency is savvy in certain situations, but unless someone like Connor McDavid or Nathan Mackinnon becomes available it's a no from me. The Canes employed that strategy with Justin Faulk to help them get to where they currently are, and now they're staring at their Cup window. You sign your best player when you're right on the cusp. Losing Hamilton would force the Hurricanes to revamp their system.

My ears perked up at the idea of Korpisalo or Merzlikins on the Hurricanes, though. Goaltending is clearly the Canes' biggest question mark heading into this season, and depending on how it goes they'll either re-sign Mrazek or scour the market. I tend to believe they really like Mrazek and want him to succeed (obviously), so I think they're inclined to keep him but at the same time aren't afraid to go in a different direction. If I'm running the Canes, I'm paying very close attention to the goalie market (and Darcy Kuemper) all season.

I agree with the panel here that the Hurricanes are about a goalie and a mystery minor tweak away from Cup contention. Figuring out if the solution to that is internal or if the Canes will have to outsource a goalie will be the most important task this season. As James said, though, they're awfully close to the cap and need to get Svechnikov and Hamilton deals done.

The Canes aren't exactly in must-win mode yet and the core is still super young, but the decisions made now will matter the most when that time comes. These next two seasons are really going to show us what Waddell and the rest of the Hurricanes front office can (or can't) do. — Sara Civian

The Athletic LOADED: 12.28.2020

1197403 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Mike Hoffman is joining Blues on a non-guaranteed tryout contract

Elliott Friedman

December 27, 2020, 8:31 PM

There were a lot of "huhs?" and "whats?" when the St. Louis Blues announced on Sunday that Mike Hoffman is joining the team on a non-guaranteed tryout contract, but plenty is happening beneath the surface.

There was, I believe, a lot of interest in the superb shooter across the NHL. But, at a time when the market for forwards absolutely cratered — only Taylor Hall, Tyler Toffoli, Mikael Granlund and Craig Smith signed for \$3 million — it became clear Hoffman was going to carefully consider his best fit.

When Alexander Steen revealed he wasn't going to play this season, the odds increased on St. Louis as the landing spot. Steen is not the only Blue going on Long-Term Injured Reserve. The other is Vladimir Tarasenko. That's \$13.25 million in combined cap space (although Tarasenko is expected to return). Even with Vince Dunn still to be signed, there's room to get Hoffman signed at the start of the season. (Personal guess: one year, between \$4 million and \$4.5 million. That's what a few teams thought the winger was looking for.)

Hoffman gets what he wants: a big role on a good team. St. Louis gets what it wants: a scorer to ease Tarasenko's absence.

It's not the first time they've considered Hoffman. When Ottawa decided to trade him, the Blues did a deep dive and were very much in the race to acquire him.

So, there's your explainer... now back to reading angry tweets about cap circumvention.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 12.28.2020

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Sportsnet.ca / 3 bold Montreal Canadiens predictions for 2021

Eric Engels

December 27, 2020, 1:48 PM

A necessary caveat before I divulge three predictions that might (but probably won't) come true: I'm writing this on Dec. 15, more than a week out from its publication, before a return-to-play protocol has been agreed on by the NHL and NHLPA and prior to a schedule being released.

So if (when) I'm wrong, there's that.

Don't discount it as a factor, because without knowing where the Montreal Canadiens will be playing on any given night, or how frequently they'll be playing or what their travel agenda will be, making an accurate estimate on how many points they'll finish the season with seems futile. So I'll steer clear of the big-picture stuff.

Now, with the excuses out of the way, I'm ready to play ball here... mostly because my editors told me to.

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

1. The Canadiens will have a top-five power play this season

Why not start off with a bomb of a prediction?

Make no mistake — this is as bold as it gets. After a historically bad run in 2018–19, when the Canadiens operated the NHL's second-worst power play (13.3%), they climbed to only 22nd-best with a 4.4-percent increase in 2019–20, and they operated at just over 15 per cent efficiency in the Toronto bubble this past summer. So thinking they're going to improve enough to pierce the NHL's top five, without the type of elite-level talent up front of, say, the Edmonton Oilers or Toronto Maple Leafs or Tampa Bay Lightning or Vancouver Canucks or Vegas Golden Knights or Colorado Avalanche or Washington Capitals, is crazy.



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It's especially crazy considering the Canadiens haven't made any changes to the coaching staff — Kirk Muller and Dominique Ducharme are still running the power play under Claude Julien's supervision — and their top-scoring forward on the power play over the last two seasons combined (Max Domi) was traded to the Columbus Blue Jackets for a forward (Josh Anderson) who has a total of 11 power play points in 267 NHL games.

But I still say they're going to do it.

The addition of Anderson and Tyler Toffoli to a unit that includes Shea Weber up top and a healthy Jonathan Drouin — he missed 42 games last year with a torn tendon in his wrist and was a shell of himself in the eight games he played upon his return — and Nick Suzuki running the flanks has promise.

Muller summed up what the Canadiens are gaining with the additions of Toffoli and Anderson with these comments made Nov. 25:

"Toffoli is a right-hander. Sitting in that slot, he's had some great success. You watch, he's got quick hands, so he can make plays in those areas. He has the ability to score in that slot with his shot. He can be very dangerous and effective, which could open things up for other guys. As for Josh, he's a big body. He can play around the net; he can use that size. I know he hasn't played a lot [on the power play], but if you look at what he's capable of doing, and his ability to play around there, that net presence — which is huge on a power play — I think he can be effective on the power play in that position."

I agree with all of that.

Toffoli being a dual threat from the bumper position, with Anderson providing a net presence (in addition to what he can contribute with puck recovery and control), has a multifaceted benefit — at least in theory. First off, it frees up Weber's shot, which was successfully suppressed last season.

Without a viable dual-threat option in the slot (sorry, Brendan Gallagher), without Drouin there to set plays up, and without a consistent net-front presence, Weber had just 46 shot attempts and scored just three goals on the power play in 65 games.

Contrast that with his first season with the Canadiens in 2016–17, with Max Pacioretty, Alex Galchenyuk, Alexander Radulov and Andrei Markov providing threats from their respective positions, Weber had 126 shot attempts and scored 12 goals on the power play in 78 games.

Now Toffoli and Anderson are shooting threats, Suzuki is a more dangerous one, and everyone gets a bit more space as a result. That's the other benefit of those off-season additions.

A second unit that has Tomas Tatar (who tied Suzuki for the lead in power play points last season) in the bumper, Jeff Petry up top, Gallagher in the low post, Joel Armia on the forecheck and Jesperi Kotkaniemi running the half-wall and contributing to zone entries can threaten, too.

2. Suzuki will lead the Canadiens in scoring

Understanding we should be tempering expectations and allowing for the possibility of the dreaded sophomore slump to hit Suzuki, I just don't see that happening.

His maturity is a factor in that. But I also see it as an advantage that the 21-year-old is starting his second season after two extensive pauses in the action — especially after witnessing what he did following the first one.

Suzuki had the necessary time to recover, to add muscle and work on his game and his individual skills, and then he was promoted and depended on as the top centre in the bubble. And boy, did he ever leave off on a positive note, with four goals and seven points in 10 playoff games.

Think about what that will do for his confidence versus finishing off with just one assist in his final nine games prior to the March pause of the NHL season.

It can't hurt.

Neither can Suzuki having better wingers on any given night.

Looking back on his first season, that was hardly the case — don't forget he started on the wing of the fourth line.

Is a point per game out of the question? No.

Am I betting on Suzuki scoring 56 points in 56 games? Not necessarily.

But I don't think he'll be far off if he remains healthy. And with an increased role on the power play, I'm betting on him to lead the Canadiens in points.

3. Weber will finish top five in Norris voting

A rested and healthy Weber is a player that should be feared. And on a team with improved depth at all positions, he's going to be more rested than he's accustomed to in-season.

Also, since we're looking at a 56-game schedule, one where you could see much more of a playoff dynamic — with the Canadian teams playing exclusively against each other and, perhaps, in more of a baseball series-style format — that plays into Weber's hands. Not only because he's made for the intensity of playoff-type hockey, but also because he's been far more productive in the first half of the season than he has over the last half in recent years.

Weber had 12 goals and 31 points in his first 41 games last season. It's not a stretch to think he can produce even more with better players around him and playing a minute or two less per night than the 24 minutes he averaged.

A boost in power play production would help a great deal — as noted in my first prediction, I think he'll have a considerable one — and it's also conceivable he'll be much more effective in his own end.

Weber's role isn't going to change — he's still going to be top dog at even strength, on the power play and on the penalty kill. So long as there are enough voters who appreciate that he's an everything-defenceman and not just a high-flyer or offensive type, he'll once again garner Norris consideration.

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TSN.CA / Newfoundland's Mercer, Newhook fuelled by provincial pride at World Juniors

By Mark Masters

Team Canada held an optional morning skate and media availability on Sunday.

Dawson Mercer and Alex Newhook are feeling the love from back home in Newfoundland.

"It's unmatched," said Newhook, a centre from Boston College. "I don't think anywhere else in the world would have that support. Myself and Dawson, we're feeling it first hand and we're super proud to be from Newfoundland. The support we get, it's been crazy."

What was Mercer's phone looking like after he scored twice last night?



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"It was blowing up, honestly," the Chicoutimi Saguenéens forward said. "I love seeing the videos of my friends and how hooked they were and everything."

Even the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, Andrew Furey, tweeted his support, telling Mercer and Newhook, "your home province is cheering you on."

This the first time since 1992 that two players from the province have made it to the World Juniors. Mercer and Newhook actually grew up as rivals. Mercer is a "Baymen" from tiny Bay Roberts while Newhook is a "Townie" from St. John's.

"There was always a rivalry, for sure," said Newhook. "It was always the town against the bay. We played a lot against him and that helped both of us. Usually there's not too much competition once you get older and to have a lot of great players in our age group back home has helped us both get here today."

"I only played with him when it was Team NL tournaments and a lot of time was against him," Mercer said. "It was very competitive, especially for our age group. It was, honestly, a pretty good year in Newfoundland so the competition was decent."

Who had the edge growing up?

"I remember we took it my first year of bantam before I moved away," said Newhook, who left home at age 14, "so that will probably give me bragging rights."

"Yeah, they got the best of us there," Mercer recalled with a chuckle, "but we had it the year before, though."

Newhook and Mercer may be from the same province, but they bring different elements to Team Canada. Mercer is often listed as the 13th forward and described by coach Andre Tourigny as a "flex player" who can bounce around the line-up. One of his goals last night came shorthanded.

"Every team needs a guy like that," said Newhook. "He's a guy that can be put in every situation and excel."

Meanwhile, Canada prefers to keep Newhook at centre and also feeds him some power-play time. Newhook's skill was on display on his opening goal last night as he wheeled around the German defence with some fancy footwork.

"He's a very explosive and powerful player," Mercer observed. "He showed that on his goals. You could see he really went by that defenceman with ease. He has a lot of skill and offensive ability, but he's also a big guy and hard to knock off pucks. He's a strong player and he's always been like that growing up against him."

So, Newhook and Mercer are different players from different parts of Newfoundland, but in the end that shared heritage means more than anything else.

"It was a great game last night and to have us both here makes it that much more special," Newhook said.

After getting the third period off last night, Devon Levi will be back in net tonight for Canada.

"Today we will face an opponent who will bring a little more offence, so we wanted Devon to have a chance to play more minutes," Tourigny explained.

The Northeastern University freshman turns 19 today.

"We've all been giving it to him a bit," Newhook said with a smile. "All we can really get for him is a win so hopefully that will come through."

Levi stopped nine of 10 shots against the Germans and continues to impress his new teammates.

"He's been really composed and he plays really safe," Mercer said. "He's always in the right position and plays with confidence. He's always zoned

in. He's so serious and determined in all aspects whether it's warming up or in practice. I go out there to shoot on the goalies [before practice] fairly often and he's always dialed in so I think that's something that's important."

Slovakia will start Samuel Hlavaj, who posted a sparkling 33-3-2 record with Sherbrooke in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League last season.

"He's a big body," said Mercer. "He had a good team last year that had a lot of success and he was a big part of that. We will move the puck side to side and get quick shots on net."

The IIHF issued a one-game suspension to Team Canada's Braden Schneider for checking to the head and neck area. The Brandon defenceman was ejected from last night's game in the first period after catching Jan-Luca Schumacher up high.

Here's the explanation from the IIHF:

"In an attempt to gain possession of an incoming puck from his teammate, German forward Jan-Luca Schumacher slowed down and decided to chip the puck outside of his defensive zone. At no time during this sequence did Schumacher establish control of the puck. At the same time, Schneider skates towards Schumacher. Without any regard to the puck at any time and seeing his opponent in a vulnerable position, Schneider delivers a body check to the head of Schumacher. Schneider delivers the check slightly elevating his shoulder, hitting his opponent directly in the head ... while Schneider's elbow was down and while there was a size difference between the two players – because Schneider slightly elevated his shoulder into Schumacher's head resulting in the player's head snapping back, Schneider actions were extremely dangerous, created a serious risk of injury to Schumacher ... Schneider could have easily avoided the check."

Tourigny was asked about the play this morning before the decision came down.

"It's a hockey play," Canada's coach said. "The size between the two players is a big factor. I won't lie, I didn't review the clip 22 times, just saw it and moved on, nothing we can do about it. We don't want, obviously, a hit to the head, but I think it was a hockey play. I don't think he meant any harm to the opponent."

Moncton's Jordan Spence, a healthy scratch against the Germans, will draw into the lineup.

Despite the 16-2 win last night, Tourigny still highlighted areas where he feels Team Canada can improve.

"We have a lot of little things, little habits from our face-off routes to our net presence to our reloading, a lot of details we need to get better at during the tournament," Tourigny said. "The spirit of the players this morning is really good. The players have good energy. I like their focus. They've stayed grounded so that's important."

Slovakia, meanwhile, is feeling confident after shutting out Switzerland 1-0 on Christmas Day.

"We battled hard for a whole 60 minutes," said coach Robert Petrovicky. "We played for each other and especially at the end of the game we blocked lots of shots. It was a team effort."

What's the key tonight against Canada?

"We got to be concentrating as soon as the puck drops, especially early in the game," he said. "The boys are ready. They're excited. They're prepared. We got to keep the spirit up and play hard for every shift."

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