



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 30, 2020

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### Hurricanes have one national TV game on NBC Sports, again

By Chip Alexander

NBC Sports has announced its national TV schedule for the NHL's 2020-21 regular season and the Carolina Hurricanes are on the schedule.

Once.

In what has become a yearly affair, the Canes have been generally ignored by the TV folks in setting up the NBC schedule. After reaching the Stanley Cup playoffs the past two years and drawing attention for some fast-paced play under coach Rod Brind'Amour and their postgame Storm Surges, the Canes have been ignored again.

On April 4, the Canes' home game against the Dallas Stars will be televised on NBC Sports Network as part of the Sunday

Night schedule. That's it. In contrast, the Chicago Blackhawks, a Canes rival in the Central Division this season, will be on seven times.

The NBC release Tuesday mentioned such "starpower" as Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews, Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby, and also mentioned Alexis Lafreniere of the New York Rangers, the first overall pick of the 2020 NHL Draft. No mention of Sebastian Aho or Andrei Svechnikov.

The NHL regular season, as now planned, will open Jan. 13 with a tripleheader on NBC Sports Network, including a primetime game between the 2020 Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning and the Blackhawks. The Canes' season opener is Jan. 14.



### Look Ahead — Bold sports predictions for 2021

NSJ's sports staff goes out on a limb to guess what could happen in the next year

After an unpredictable 2020, the NSJ sports staff is still going to take a swing at what will happen in 2021. Sports editor Cory Lavalette and staff writers Brett Friedlander and Shawn Krest try and predict what the big stories of the next year will be.

Brett Friedlander

ACC scraps divisional format

The coronavirus pandemic brought about numerous changes in sports in 2020. Some, most notably the NCAA waiver that eliminated the minimum-win requirement for bowl eligibility, will soon be forgotten. Others, however, worked so well that they'll become permanent. Among them is the ACC's move to eliminate the divisional format it has used since 2005. Ditching the Atlantic and Coastal divisions ensured that the league's two best teams would be matched against one another in its championship game, stimulating greater interest, higher television ratings and increased revenue. Not only will the ACC go division-less in 2021, but it will also increase its conference schedule from eight to nine games to provide its television network with more content. The Notre Dame experiment will also eventually become permanent, especially now that Jim Phillips — with his ties to the Irish — has become commissioner. But that won't happen for at least another couple of years.

Final Four for Wolfpack women

NC State's women's basketball team was riding high with momentum after winning its first ACC Tournament championship in 29 years last March. But coach Wes Moore's Wolfpack was deprived of a chance to add to its resume when the NCAA Tournament was shelved because of COVID-19. With most of its important pieces back, including national Player of the Year candidate Elissa Cunane, and soaring confidence after an early-season upset of then-No. 1 South Carolina, State is poised to make up for its lost opportunity by joining the nation's elite and advancing to the Final Four for the first time since 1988 and only the second time in school history.

Gwiazdowski will qualify for Olympics, win a medal

This is a repeat of last year's prediction but because the Olympics were postponed until next summer, it still stands: A two-time NCAA champion at NC State, Nick Gwiazdowski is one of the nation's premier freestyle wrestlers at 125 kilograms (275 pounds). Since his graduation, the former Wolfpack star has twice made the U.S. National Team that competed in the World Championships and both times, in 2017 and '18, he has come home with a bronze medal. His next step is to represent his country next summer at the Olympics in Tokyo. And when he does, he'll bring home the hardware from there, too.



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Shawn Krest

Another challenge for Coach K

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski will be moving on to his next challenge. The Hall of Fame Duke coach announces that 2023 will be his last season on the Duke bench and he'll then move on to the newly created role of College Basketball Czar. After years of criticizing the NCAA for not having one person to speak for the sport, Coach K becomes the first person to assume the job, which will be a liaison with coaches, players and administration.

Quarterback plans for Panthers

The Panthers stick with Teddy Bridgewater to try to make a run at a playoff berth in 2021, but the team uses a fifth-round draft pick to take Texas A&M's Kellen Mond in the spring as the quarterback of the future. As Carolina struggles to hold onto one of the final wild card spots, the team's management will be called into question over deciding to contend instead of a tank job to "Play foul for Sam Howell" in the 2022 draft.

New-look minor leagues

With budgets tight already following a canceled 2020 season, North Carolina's remaining minor league teams will face even more financial pressure when the season starts late and crowd capacity is still heavily limited. Fans looking for a fun, cheap family night at the ballpark will be outraged as teams announce steep hikes in ticket prices and concessions. Faced with the possibility of closing up shop, more than one franchise in the state will be put up for sale. One possible bright side of the industry's struggles to survive will be a renewed push for an MLB expansion team in the state.

Cory Lavalette

Everyone's chasing Elliott

Chase Elliott will strengthen his grip on being the face of auto racing by winning a second straight NASCAR Cup Series title.

With more road courses — where Elliott dominates — on the 2021 schedule, the Hendrick Motorsports No. 9 will lead the series in wins with 11 — including a staggering five on road courses — heading into the playoffs. From there, he will outlast a rejuvenated Kyle Busch to become the 11th driver to win back-to-back championships and the first since Jimmie Johnson won five in a row from 2006-10. Elliott will also be named NASCAR's Most Popular Driver for the fourth straight year.

Hurricanes win Central Division

The NHL had to reconfigure its divisions for its upcoming 56-game season, putting all seven Canadian teams together due to travel restrictions in and out of the country. While the Hurricanes did not have any Canadian teams with them in the Metropolitan Division, the shuffling means they will play frequently against teams they don't see often in a normal season in a new-fangled Central Division. That includes both Stanley Cup Final teams from the 2019-20 season: Tampa Bay and Dallas. It won't matter. The Stars and Lightning both stumble in the early going with injury issues and Carolina capitalizes, building an early lead by faring well against the two powers of the division and feasting on the also-rans to win the Central. The Hurricanes, however, get bounced by the Lightning in the playoffs, falling just short of reaching the final four.

Big turnover among college coaches

With fans finally returning to the stands, college athletic departments decide to loosen their purse strings in 2021 — and a lot of coaches move on from North Carolina. NC Central's LeVelle Moton, UNCG's Wes Miller and Western Carolina's Mark Prosser all leave their respective basketball programs for greener pastures, while NC State's Dave Doeren and Charlotte's Will Healy will both land in the SEC after nine-win seasons. Doeren will become the latest coach to try and revive Tennessee, while Healy takes over at Arkansas after Sam Pittman is let go after just two seasons.



## Gold: In defense of the Hurricanes

By Adam Gold

We are now 16 days out from the Carolina Hurricanes and Detroit Red Wings dropping the puck on the 2021 season and it's less than a week until training camp begins. As we approach the opening draw and the 16-week sprint that will follow, we'll continue our look at the 2021 Hurricanes by position group. Last time, we addressed the forward group, this go-round, we'll delve into the blue line with two significant departures as well as an enormously important return.

Note: While the NHL and its member clubs insist on calling this the "2020-2021" season I will not. No part of this year will have taken place in the calendar year of 2020 -- something we should all be thankful for, since 2020 sucked on ice -- so, let's just call it the "2021" season. It's good for brevity, as well.

Before we start, a quick prospect update. The Hurricanes signed first round pick Seth Jarvis to his entry level contract on Monday. The 13th overall pick scored 42 goals and amassed 98 points in 58 games for Portland in the Western Hockey League last season. But, as he's just 18 years old, and a long shot to crack Carolina's line up, he'll likely return to the Winterhawks for one more year before pushing for the NHL roster next summer. The only caveat to that is if the WHL cancels its season due to Covid-19 restrictions. In that case, he'd be eligible for the American Hockey League, assuming the AHL tries to have some sort of season.

2020 continues to suck.

Also, at the IIHF World Juniors, Carolina's second round picks are impressive. Forward Noel Gunler (41st overall) scored



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twice in Sweden's 4-0 win over Austria. He now has 3 goals in 2 games in the tournament. Meanwhile, Russian prospect Vasily Ponomarev has opened eyes with a pair of goals through two games heading into Tuesday's match against the Austrians. Ryan Suzuki (2 goals and an assist) as Team Canada is off to a 3-0 start in Alberta.

So now, without further delay, on to the blue line, the Canes' position group that is the envy of many around the National Hockey League.

In the 2012 NHL draft, the Hurricanes were without a 1st round pick. They did, however have a pair of 2nd rounders, one in the third and three picks in round four. That was the Phil DiGiuseppe/Brock McGinn year if you're keeping score at home. Looking for a defenseman in the middle of the 4th round, Carolina snapped up Trevor Carrick with the 115th pick.

Carrick has played seven NHL games, the last three of which came last year for the San Jose Sharks. Five spots later, the Canes took Jacob Slavin from the Chicago Steel of the USHL. He stayed in the United States Hockey League for one more season, spent the next two at Colorado College and then turned pro. It took just 14 games with the Charlotte Checkers before Slavin showed up in the NHL and the rest is history. When it's all written, Slavin will likely be the best defenseman to ever wear a Hurricanes jersey.

The first time I saw Slavin play it was obvious he was NHL caliber. Smooth beyond words, calm under pressure and far faster than he appears, he just looked the part of stay-at-home stalwart. That was underselling number 74. Yes, the spot was originally that of Dougie Hamilton, but Slavin is 100% All Star and his offensive game keeps improving, to the point that as the Canes become deeper offensively at forward, the point totals will rise. But, even without a 50-point season on the horizon, Slavin is one of the very best in the NHL.

Speaking of Hamilton, it's amazing how being comfortable in your own skin -- not to mention your surroundings -- can be to your performance as a player. Hamilton's measurables have always been off the charts. Tall, fluid and athletic, with great vision and a great shot from the point, Hamilton had always been an enigma from Boston (where he was drafted) to Calgary (where he was dealt) to his first half season in Raleigh (after arriving in the trade for Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin).

However, midway through the year, when the calendar turned to 2019, Dougie's offensive game picked up and he displayed the game-changing talent that is his calling card. The playoffs weren't great in spite of the run to the conference finals, but he had found a home. Then, last season, that dynamic offensive ability was evident virtually every night. With 14 goals and 40 points in 47 games, the Norris Trophy was part of the 2020 equation for Dougie.

But, it was his improved play on the other side of the puck that turned the most heads. Hamilton became part of the penalty kill, was no longer a liability in his own end and was a staggering plus-30 before the broken leg ended his year in January. On top of that, he has simply become a fan favorite. It will be interesting to see what happens in the coming off season as this is the final year of his contract and is headed for unrestricted free agency.

Remember the Slavin draft note from a few graphs earlier? Fourth round pick, second defender taken in that round by Carolina. Well, the following year, Carolina was still looking for help on defense and in the 3rd round (66th overall) they grabbed a University of New Hampshire product named Brett Pesce. He was coming off a freshman year that saw him score once in 38 games and would play two more seasons with the Wildcats before turning pro.

Much like his pal, Slavin, Pesce needed just seven AHL games before he was summoned. On October 24, 2015 in San Jose, "Pesh" entered the line up and hasn't come out. Not quite the skating wizard as Slavin, and maybe not as good in the offensive end as his friend. I mean, he once took a slap shot that hit Justin Williams in the face (and caromed in for a goal, mind you) and the Captain simply got stitched up and returned to the game. So, how hard a shot can he possibly have, right? (smiley face emoji)

Brett is probably the Canes' best pure defensive defenseman, their best on the penalty kill and -- along with Slavin -- one of two absolutely indispensable players.

Because of injuries to Pesce and Hamilton, not to mention a lack of faith in utilizing Jake Gardiner, Haydn Fleury (more on him in a bit) and Trevor van Riemsdyk for high leverage minutes, President/General Manager Don Waddell swung two trades to reinforce the blue line. The most significant of those was the acquisition of Brady Skjei from the Rangers -- the other, was Sami Vatanen from New Jersey. Carolina sent New York the lesser of their two first round picks in the most recent draft for the rangy, left-shot, 26-year old Minnesotan.

He was less than at his best in the seven games (1 assist, -4 rating) he played in a Canes sweater. While there were missed assignments and ugly turnovers as he struggled to acclimate to Carolina's style, that is to be expected, especially as he was put into situations with which he was unaccustomed in New York. On the bright side he did create a fair number of scoring chances that were this close to finding their mark. And, when the playoffs began, we saw a different player than before the pause.

Skjei showed a physical brand of hockey the Hurricanes will need come January 14. And, who will forget the highlight, the hit in the opening moments of the series against the Rangers that cost former -- and now current -- teammate Jesper Fast the rest of the post season.

With Slavin, Hamilton, Pesce and Skjei the Hurricanes have a top four blue line group in the upper echelon of the entire NHL.

Now is where it gets interesting. I'm sure there are other adjectives you might want to conjure up, but for the sake of argument, let's just go with interesting for now.

Haydn Fleury really had a breakout winter, establishing himself as a legitimate NHL defenseman. It took a while for the 2014 7th overall pick to come around, but he's big, a good skater, athletic enough to play the right side (he's a left shot), has some offensive upside and performed very well when there were really not many good options for Rod Brind'Amour and company. When Dougie Hamilton and Brett Pesce were lost, Fleury stepped up. In his final 21 games before the shutdown, Fleury had a pair of goals, 9 points and was +3 in 16:30 TOI per game.



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He continued that brand of hockey into the playoffs and I could argue that Haydn was one of Carolina's 2 or 3 best defenseman in Toronto. He's definitely in the group and will likely play with Jake Gardiner.

I say "likely" because we don't know how much Gardiner will be pushed by American Hockey League defenseman of the year, Jake Bean. More on him in a second, but back to Gardiner, whose first year in Carolina was, let's just say underwhelming.

Gardiner was brought in, in large part, to rejuvenate a power play that became somewhat anemic. And, while he was okay, piloting the Canes's second man-advantage unit, he wasn't lethal for sure. Overall, he posted a 4 goal, 24 point season and was a -24 and ultimately demoted to 3rd pair/power play specialist. Was he completely healed from injuries -- including one to his back -- suffered the previous year with the Maple Leafs?

Healed? Yes. But, Jake's skating was not what it once was. But, when you're reliant on your skating to move the puck and create offense, and it's not quite there, well, you can figure out the rest. Gardiner seemed better in the bubble, but he only played more than 15 minutes once in six games and he was out of the line up twice in the series loss to Boston. His salary almost guarantees his spot in the line up, at least initially. After that, it will depend on him, or...

Bean, the team's first pick (13th) in the 2016 draft, was voted the AHL's top defenseman a year ago. For the second straight season, he notched double-digit goals and ended the year with 48 points in 59 games played with the Charlotte Checkers. He's a smooth-skating lefty, with good vision, puck-moving and playmaking ability and seems ideal for a power play role.

Sort of sounds like I've just described Jake Gardiner.

At some point, Bean will either crack the line up or he's got to be moved. He's too talented to sit and atrophy. It's somewhat

surprising that something hasn't happened with regards to Bean's place in the organization to this point, especially with the emergence of Fleury and other options on the left side of the blue line. But, I would have to consider this his last, best chance to make a mark with the club who drafted him 4 ½ years ago. Rod Brind'Amour is going to play the best six defensemen at his disposal. If Bean passes Gardiner -- and that's possible -- he'll get his chance.

Gustav Forsling and Joakim Ryan give the Hurricanes solid depth beyond the top six. Each has more than 100 NHL games under their skates. Neither is afraid of contact and each is ideal as an extra defender, and in this age of Covid, where you can turn up positive (and that's a negative) at any moment, usable depth on the back end is critical.

In very much the same vein as I determined with the forwards, the key to Carolina's success lies not among the stars. The Canes' top trio is among the sport's best. In fact, I'm not sure there is a better 1-2-3 punch on the blue line in the entire sport. So, the play of Brady Skjei and Haydn Fleury this year will determine whether the Canes are very good or dominant on defense.

Skjei doesn't have to be an offensive force, though he skates extremely well and did appear to have that in his arsenal when we saw him up close. But, he has to pair with Pesce and establish a second shutdown pair that will log heavy minutes. Skjei has to kill penalties, play a physical game and minimize the mental mistakes and turnovers. If he does that, he won't have to score a point to have a high impact.

All Fleury has to do is be the same player he was during the final 30 games of his 2020 campaign. Nothing spectacular. Be solid, reliable, physical and unafraid. If he does that, it will be the latest positive step in his development and he'll never come out of the line up.

Next: The goalies



## Canes Host Stars on NBCSN's Sunday Night Hockey in April

Game times, local TV schedule still to come

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes will be exclusively featured on national television in early April when they host the Dallas Stars in Raleigh.

The April 4 match-up against the 2019-20 Western Conference Champions, one of eight on the Canes' 56-game 2020-21 regular-season schedule, will be broadcast on NBCSN's "Sunday Night Hockey."

Given the Canes boast some of the league's most exciting young talent, including the player who scored the first lacrosse-style goal in NHL history (twice!) and could very well compete for the Central Division title, it's a bit curious that this is the team's lone exclusive national television appearance, but hey! More local broadcasts isn't a bad thing.

Speaking of which, a local television schedule will be released soon, as will game start times for the entirety of the 2020-21 regular-season schedule.

The Canes opening training camp on Jan. 3, and the puck drops on the 2020-21 season in Detroit on Jan. 14.



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## Hurricanes Players with the Most to Prove in 2021

Which Hurricanes players have the most to prove in what is sure to be a wild 2021 NHL season?

By Brett Finger

The 2021 season will be a season unlike any other.

The Carolina Hurricanes will be in a new division, facing different teams and playing a unique schedule while having the reality of a COVID-19 world knocking at the door at all times.

For this team to be a real Stanley Cup player, many players will have to make a statement with their play. Here, we'll take a look at some of those players and why the 2021 season is so important for them.

Nino Niederreiter

Niederreiter's heroic arrival and immediate, game-changing impact on the Hurricanes in January of 2019 was a hard act to follow over the course of a full season, and the ups and downs of his 2019-20 season were a testament to that.

After compiling 14 goals and 30 points in 36 games in Carolina down the stretch of the 2018-19 season, Niederreiter scored just 11 goals in 67 games this past season. He saw his ice time drop, his role on the team brought into question and his future with the organization become a question mark entering the final two seasons of a deal that sees him count \$5.25 million against an increasingly tight salary cap situation.

Despite his severe downturn in production, Nino will be presented with a genuine opportunity to claim a spot on the second line and be relied upon as a scorer. That has more to do with the roster's current state and less to do about confidence in him regaining the form he was in upon his acquisition, though.

On paper, there is a clear spot alongside Vincent Trocheck and Martin Necas. Trocheck struggled early after getting dealt at the deadline, but his playoff performance was promising despite the lack of real production. Necas had an underrated rookie season wherein he was a strong secondary offensive weapon in limited minutes.

Niederreiter will be at the front of the line of players aiming to fill that final slot. If he reclaims his scoring touch and manages to score at a 20-25 goal rate (over an 82-game season), he would be resolving a big issue for the Hurricanes and helping the rest of the team's forward core fall into place.

With Andrei Svechnikov's contract extension looming on the horizon and the team continuing to operate at the cap ceiling, Nino's \$5.25 million cap hit has to be warranted, and how he performs in 2021 will likely decide how long he is for this team.

Jake Gardiner and Brady Skjei

It wouldn't be a real Hurricanes season if we weren't still a bit puzzled by the pieces that make up the club's blue line.

Gardiner's first season in Carolina was every bit as rocky and unstable as it could have possibly been. You can chalk it up to bad luck or poor play, but the most reasonable analysis would be to say that it's a mixture of both.

He never fit in on the roster or in Rod Brind'Amour's scheme, and his leash was extremely short. He went from a top-four defenseman to a bottom-pairing specialty player who was sheltered in all areas in no time at all.

He has three years left on the deal he signed late in the 2019 offseason, which pays him \$4.05 million per season. His status with the team was spelled out even further when the Canes splurged and brought in Skjei, whose \$5.25 million cap hit is the third-highest among Carolina defensemen and doesn't expire until the end of the 2023-24 season.

One of Gardiner or Skjei isn't going to be around when their deals expire. It's also entirely possible, if not likely, that neither of them will be.

So... where does that leave us?

It's a big season for both of them. The Hurricanes shelled out a first-round draft pick to get Skjei, and the results were very mixed. He's a big, mobile defenseman who loves carrying the puck. The problem is that he constantly gets himself into trouble in the defensive zone, and I'm not sure if he is good enough offensively to outweigh those problems.

The redeeming part of his game is that I could envision a world where he pairs well with Brett Pesce. That, however, was also the plan with Gardiner. Skjei is a much better skater than Gardiner, which might make him a better fit with Pesce. We don't know yet. Undoubtedly, the team will pair Skjei with Pesce at the start of the season and see what happens.

There has to be something that the Hurricanes saw in Skjei for them to give up an asset that they are very rarely willing to give up. They're betting on themselves and their system to make him a bonafide top-four defenseman. He's a tantalizing talent, but it still feels like a real roll of the dice. He was inconsistent in the postseason, but he showed signs that he could be that player. He's probably the team's biggest wildcard entering the 2021 season.

And, of course, Jake Bean is waiting in the wings.

Warren Foegele

The Hurricanes signed Foegele to a one-year extension over the offseason, which means he is again playing for a contract in 2021.

He is a good player in the right role, but his ceiling is a bit of a question mark. I truly think he can score 20 goals in an NHL



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season, but consistency is probably the biggest concern for him.

To this point, he has been a pretty good third-line player with a lot of valuable intangibles. He's always going at 100%, kills penalties, is very physical, draws penalties and consistently finds himself with great scoring chances.

The reality, though, is that the Hurricanes have a number of those players. Brock McGinn and Jordan Martinook are guys who fit that kind of description, but I don't think there is any way to justify having all three of them on your roster on real NHL contracts. That means that one of them probably has to go after 2021.

Foegele is an RFA after this season, which gives him a pretty big leg up on the other two players, but having a strong season wherein he builds on 2019-20 and proves he can be a real offensive weapon would go a long way in establishing himself as a step above the rest in that "depth forward" category.

Brett Pesce

It may be surprising to see that name on this list, but the 2021 season is a big season for a player who has long been one of the most valuable pieces on Carolina's roster.

Coming off of what was perhaps his best season in the NHL in 2018-19 wherein he logged a franchise record +30 plus/minus (no, plus/minus isn't a great statistic, but that number is outrageous), Pesce struggled mightily at times in 2019-20.

For the first time in his NHL career, Pesce was a negative defensive impact in terms of isolated 5v5 shot impact. That number backs up what was pretty apparent when watching him play - he was making uncommon mistakes in the defensive zone and found himself out of position more often than at any point in his career to that point.

There could be a number of reasons for this. He saw most of his ice time with new players in a new system in Gardiner and Joel Edmundson. It would stand to reason that seeing almost an even split between those defensive partners would contribute to a sudden drop in his numbers.

## Carolina Hurricanes top 25 under 25 #9: Morgan Geekie

Our list continues with the NHL's all-time leader in regular-season points per games.

By Andrew Schnittker

continue the top 10 of our list with the first player who's a very safe bet to at least see time with the Hurricanes this season, if not be an NHL regular. Since being selected by Carolina in the third round of the 2017 draft, it's been a relatively quick ascension for Geekie to the NHL ranks.

Geekie was a prolific scorer for the Tri-City Americans in the WHL in his draft year, putting up a whopping 35 goals and 90 points in 72 games. After the Hurricanes picked him, he returned to Tri-City for one more season with a similar output.

In his first year of AHL eligibility in the 2018-19 season, Geekie made an immediate impact with the Charlotte Checkers. As a rookie, Geekie posted 19 goals and 46 points in 73 games, finishing fifth in scoring on a loaded Checkers team.

Some more credence is lent to that theory when you look at his performance alongside Jacob Slavin last season. When those two were on the ice together, they were excellent, just like they'd been for years. Their minutes together saw a serious decline, though, with Dougie Hamilton emerging as a Norris Trophy caliber defender and making up one of the best pairings in hockey with Slavin.

The Hurricanes really need Skjei to be a good fit next to Pesce. They've clearly pulled the plug on the Gardiner experiment, so it's either Skjei or Haydn Fleury alongside Pesce in the short term (barring a huge step in Bean's development). If Skjei doesn't work, that trade looks even sillier, and the thought of a backup option of a Skjei-Gardiner pairing is the stuff nightmares are made of.

Most of all, Pesce needs to stay healthy. One down season with many variables isn't a cause for concern given just how great he has been throughout his career, but I don't think it's a stretch to say that his shoulder injuries are troubling. He had another serious operation that ended his 2019-20 campaign, and with how important he is to this team, the Hurricanes can't afford to have this turn into a lingering long-term issue.

Honorable Mentions

Ryan Dzingel is entering the final year of his two-year contract and is slated to hit the UFA market again in 2021. After a strong start, his first season was a mess. He dropped down and occasionally out of the lineup as he never got a strong foothold on a particular role on the team. If he isn't scoring goals, his value plummets.

Petr Mrazek, like every goalie in the organization, is entering the final year of his contract. At this point, it's fair to say that he isn't a bonafide starting goalie. The best version of himself is capable of flat-out stealing games, but he's too inconsistent, and his reckless playstyle really hurts when he isn't totally locked in. Is he a long-term option for the team? If he is, what does his role look like?

Does Jake Bean exist? Will he play? Will he be good? So many questions.



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remains at two points per game played, ranking him first all time ahead of a fellow named Wayne Gretzky.

More than Geekie's small-sample accolades, however, he showed he belonged. Geekie is an ideal fit for the bottom six as a big-bodied (6-foot-3, 192 pounds), physical forward who can play a strong two-way game and chip in some offense.

Geekie earned a roster spot in camp when the NHL returned to play going into the bubble, and played in all eight of the Hurricanes' playoff games, notching an assist.

Going forward, that hard-nosed, two-way playing style should serve him well in a bottom-six role. He'll have to earn his spot in camp again for the upcoming regular season, as the

Hurricanes come in with 13 NHL-caliber forwards, Geekie included.

Projecting out down the road, Geekie's ideal role is probably that of a fourth-line center, though it's not hard to see him as a third-line player if his game continues to develop. If Geekie can earn a spot in camp, he's likely to play a role as the Canes' fourth center behind Sebastian Aho, Vincent Trocheck and Jordan Staal.

It's a contract year for Geekie, but he'll be an RFA and should figure into the Hurricanes' future plans if he keeps building on his impressive debut. Geekie's combination of physical, two-way play and scoring touch make him an ideal bottom-six forward, and he should be able to carve out a role there for years to come.

#### **TODAY'S LINKS**

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article248156330.html>

<https://nsjonline.com/article/2020/12/look-ahead-bold-sports-predictions-for-2021/>

<https://www.wralsportsfan.com/gold-in-defense-of-the-hurricanes/19449640/>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/canes-host-stars-on-nbc-sunday-night-hockey-in-april/c-319908632>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2020/12/29/22194072/carolina-hurricanes-players-with-most-to-prove-2021-niederreiter-skjei-gardiner-pesce-foegele-mrazek>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2020/12/29/22203776/carolina-hurricanes-top-25-under-25-9-morgan-geekie>



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## SportScan

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

1181128 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes have one national TV game on NBC Sports, again

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

DECEMBER 29, 2020 05:03 PM

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Once.

In what has become a yearly affair, the Canes have been generally ignored by the TV folks in setting up the NBC schedule. After reaching the Stanley Cup playoffs the past two years and drawing attention for some fast-paced play under coach Rod Brind'Amour and their postgame Storm Surges, the Canes have been ignored again.

On April 4, the Canes' home game against the Dallas Stars will be televised on NBC Sports Network as part of the Sunday Night schedule. That's it. In contrast, the Chicago Blackhawks, a Canes rival in the Central Division this season, will be on seven times.

The NBC release Tuesday mentioned such "starpower" as Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews, Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby, and also mentioned Alexis Lafreniere of the New York Rangers, the first overall pick of the 2020 NHL Draft. No mention of Sebastian Aho or Andrei Svechnikov.

The NHL regular season, as now planned, will open Jan. 13 with a tripleheader on NBC Sports Network, including a primetime game between the 2020 Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning and the Blackhawks. The Canes' season opener is Jan. 14.

News Observer LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181129 Carolina Hurricanes

Should the Hurricanes' taxi squad go for dependability or potential?

By Sara Civian

Dec 29, 2020

I don't know if you've heard, but there's less than a week until the Hurricanes take the ice for training camp Jan. 3. Now that the excitement of hockey coming back is sinking in, it's time to think about the specifics and quirks of the 2020-21 season.

New divisions, 56 regular-season games and the creation of a "taxi squad" are the big three. In short, the four-to-six-man taxi squad will make it easier for NHL clubs to call up players during a pandemic. CapFriendly tweeted out a solid explanation of the details.

So, it's a 23-man NHL roster with an \$81.5 million salary cap and then a max of 29 players if you include the taxi squad. The squad will travel and practice with the NHL team while being paid their full AHL salaries. But what if there are a lot of injuries or a COVID-19 outbreak including the taxi squad? Or what if an AHL player not on the squad starts tearing it up meriting a call-up, or the Hurricanes want to keep some of their best prospects down in the AHL to give them more experience?

It's strict (for a reason), but there's an option.

"There's going to be a minimum of seven days quarantine with at least four negative tests before (AHL players can join the taxi squad)," general manager Don Waddell said during a press conference last week.

Now that we've got the rules down, which players make the most sense for the Hurricanes' taxi squad?

Jake Bean

Bean is at the perfect intersection for something like this. The 22-year-old defenseman has only appeared in two NHL games but didn't look out of place, and after proving himself as one of the best defensemen in the AHL last season — even among the vets — he's ready to take the next step if needed. The combination of confidence that he can handle an NHL role and less guilt about his development considering his past two seasons in the AHL make him an obvious passenger in the Taxi of Jerks.

Alex Nedeljkovic

The rules state that there must be at least one, traveling goalie on the taxi squad if a team chooses less than three on their NHL roster, so Nedeljkovic to the practice squad is obvious. The questions now become: 1. How will Nedeljkovic respond to this quasi-promotion? and 2. How will the Canes use him?

While it's a pro for Nedeljkovic that the Canes can very easily toss him into the rotation, the 56-game schedule makes it more of a risk.

Clark Bishop

As much as some of us want to get all whimsical about who might get an opportunity at the NHL level with this new rule that sort of feels like a freebie, let's be real: the NHL rarely gives away freebies. They aren't even letting the AHL players in the taxi squad make NHL bank. The purpose of the taxi squad is to be able to call someone up when an NHL regular gets injured without going through a seven-day quarantine. Bishop is one of the best replacement centers in the league and head coach Rod Brind'Amour knows he can toss him anywhere in the bottom six with no stress.

Joakim Ryan

The Canes are going case-by-case with their taxi squad picks, but if Ryan makes the cut you know they're going dependability over stacking the squad with risky potential — and it makes sense to go dependable with this. Ryan, a 27-year-old defenseman with NHL playoff experience, doesn't need time to develop in the AHL. And frankly, the Canes signed



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him for the luxury of not worrying about his development. They can — and probably will — plug him in if needed.

Drew Shore and/or Jeremy Bracco

If the Hurricanes choose either or both of these offseason forward signings for their OG taxi squad, you'll know they're going for insurance. Doing so makes more sense to me, and I suspect someone like Brind'Amour operates on the same thought process when you remember how hard it's been for certain high-end prospects to earn his trust over more experienced options.

Ryan Suzuki and/or Joey Keane

This is the alternate reality of Shore and/or Bracco. Again, the Canes are going case-by-case, so it probably won't be all insurance or all high-end prospects, but it'll be interesting to see if the Canes pick either Suzuki or Keane for the taxi squad and what that says about both of them. I personally think both could use another season of pro development and it wouldn't serve Suzuki to spend a season in limbo. But knowing the OHL is, for lack of better phrasing, a mess right now — and knowing this is a shortened season, part of me says to heck with it. Where else is he going to get development?

The Athletic LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181168 NHL

Chicago Blackhawks' Jonathan Toews Is Out Indefinitely Because of Illness

By Andrew Knoll

Dec. 29, 2020

Jonathan Toews, the Chicago Blackhawks' center and team captain, announced on Tuesday that he would not join the team when it begins training camp on Sunday and that he would be out indefinitely because of a medical condition. He did not say what the condition was, but he described its effects.

"This off-season, I've been experiencing symptoms that have left me feeling drained and lethargic," Toews, 32, said in a statement. "I am working with doctors so I can better understand my condition."

The absence of Toews, who has won three Stanley Cups with the Blackhawks and received the Selke Trophy as the N.H.L.'s top defensive forward, will add to concerns about the team's hopes for this season.

Toews joined a pair of the Blackhawks' top prospects on the unable-to-compete list. Center Kirby Dach (wrist injury) and forward Alex Nylander (knee) will both be out for at least four months.

In the off-season, the Blackhawks committed to inexperienced goalies when they chose not to re-sign the longtime incumbent Corey Crawford, who is now with the Devils, and they traded the veteran forward Brandon Saad to the Colorado Avalanche.

The Blackhawks were in last place in the Central Division when the N.H.L. shut down in March because of the coronavirus pandemic. But Chicago, which had not reached the playoffs in the previous two seasons, was one of the 24 teams to make the expanded playoffs when the league resumed play in the summer. The Blackhawks upset the Edmonton Oilers before bowing to the Vegas Golden Knights.

Toews has been one of the most successful players of his era. In 2017, he was one of six active competitors named to a list of the 100 best

players in N.H.L. history, along with two of his teammates, right wing Patrick Kane and defenseman Duncan Keith.

"Until I can get my health back to a place where I feel I can perform at an elite level and help my team, I will not be joining the Blackhawks for training camp," Toews said.

"I am extremely disappointed, but it wouldn't be fair to myself or my teammates to attempt to play in my current condition."

His most productive seasons as an individual have come recently, as the Blackhawks struggled collectively. He had a career-best 81 points in 2018-19 and had 60 points in 70 games last season before play was suspended.

"Jonathan's health is our top priority as he deals with this medical issue," Blackhawks General Manager Stan Bowman said in a statement. "The Chicago Blackhawks organization and our medical staff will provide all necessary resources to help him return to playing hockey. While he will not report to training camp on January 3 and will be out indefinitely, we will continue to support him as he is an important part of our family."

The statement from Toews came a day after goaltender Henrik Lundqvist, a longtime Rangers star who signed with the Washington Capitals in October, announced that he would have open-heart surgery. Lundqvist, 38, revealed earlier this month that he would skip this season to treat a condition that would make playing too risky.

In a Twitter post Monday, Lundqvist said the operation was scheduled, describing it as an "aortic valve replacement, aortic root and ascending aortic replacement, to be exact."

New York Times LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181212 Websites

The Athletic / COVID-19 expert: Rink conditions, 'accelerating' virus complicates NHL's plan

By Kevin Kurz Dec 29, 2020 60

If you're like many Americans, you've probably increased your consumption of cable news since the beginning of the pandemic. And if you have, you've likely seen infectious disease and vaccine expert Dr. Peter Hotez more than once. Hotez, the co-director of the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children's Hospital, and dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine and professor of Pediatrics and Molecular Virology and Microbiology at Baylor College of Medicine, appears frequently on CNN, MSNBC, Fox News and others to discuss to latest developments when it comes to COVID-19. He has used his platform on Twitter to keep his nearly 120,000 followers informed about the pandemic while also helping them steer clear of misinformation.

On Tuesday, I spoke with the doctor over the phone about the NHL and its return-to-play plan. Training camps are set to begin on Thursday for seven teams, including the Sharks, while the remaining 24 open camp on Sunday. The season starts Jan. 13.

He isn't a stranger to hockey. Hotez attended Canadiens games at the old Forum with his grandfather, a Montreal native, and grew up in Hartford, Conn., before the Whalers relocated to Raleigh.

He has some concerns about the NHL's return after quickly browsing the league's COVID-19 testing protocols.

"You look at these rules, it's 13 pages of small space, some small type," he said. "Realistically, how do you operationalize that? At least generally



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speaking, we've learned our health system can't handle a lot of complexity. This looks pretty tough. We'll see. We'll see how it goes."

He continued: "The other way to look at it is, it is somewhat heroic what the NHL is trying to do. They are trying to find a way to navigate through this to give people hockey, and I understand it. It's just that right now, (the virus) is just so god awful."

Here is our conversation, lightly edited for clarity.

How difficult will it be for the NHL season to run smoothly?

Really tough, especially in the first couple of months of the season when no one's vaccinated and the virus is just screaming at this level right now. It would be great if we could somehow, I guess it's impossible, but to convince the NHL to postpone the season a few months when everyone is vaccinated. That would make so much of a difference.

These are athletes that are generally healthy between the ages of 20 and 40, and I've read recently that vaccinations are already behind. What's a realistic timeframe they might get one?

Hopefully, we'll do better than what we're doing right now. There's been so many missteps in the beginning. But I'm hoping by spring that most people should start getting vaccinated so that by the summer we're going to be in much better shape, clearly for the fall.

If the NHL starts (next season) in October, I think we'll be in really good shape and a good percentage of fans in the stands and players will be vaccinated. And that should go well. But I don't really have an easy answer of how you navigate the next few months.

We've seen Major League Baseball and the NFL hit a few snags in their respective seasons. Is it fair to say that the NHL should run more smoothly than those two leagues have when it comes to the virus?

Major League Baseball of course has the advantage of it's mostly outdoors, and that's a huge asset. Same with the NFL. Then the NBA locked everybody down in that bubble in Florida in a very unusual circumstance.

But if you're talking about the NHL and putting people in arenas indoors, with this level of transmission, I don't see how that's going to work. That's going to be the big question.

I've read that the environs of a rink can make the virus more transmissible.

It's the worst possible combination because it's indoors, the virus does better in the cold. This is not a good situation. That's why I say once everyone gets vaccinated, it's going to be so much better.

Ideally you do (a bubble) again and have a very modest short season just to get through it and really gear up for the fall. That would be my recommendation, but I understand the pressures, too.

Part of the league's COVID-19 protocols are that if a player is positive, he has to undergo cardiac testing before any return. How important is that, in your mind?

When this virus first emerged out of China we thought it was like the original SARS, which is mostly a respiratory illness. But we realized pretty quickly this is more of a vascular, cardiovascular and neurological illness than anything else. That's the reason for being concerned about athletes, in particular. I can't imagine things will go smoothly. It's going to be really tough to get through this, especially this part now when virus transmission is accelerating and we're just now beginning the vaccination process.

The toughest part of the season is going to be January through March. As you get to April, May and more people are vaccinated and more people are outdoors, no question it should get better. It's going to be the first part of the season that's going to be really tough.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT OTHER SPORTS DO BUT THIS IS A GOOD EXAMPLE, TO ME, OF HOW THEY ARE TRYING TO ENSURE

PLAYER SAFETY. THIS IS FROM THE "POSITIVE TEST PROTOCOL" DATA SHEET. PIC.TWITTER.COM/9I5GKTYA9N

— KEVIN KURZ (@KKURZ NHL) DECEMBER 22, 2020

If you're a healthy, 25-year-old hockey player, for example, how worried should you be about the cardiac aspect?

Most young adults handle the virus generally well, but there's always a few who don't, and we don't really know because we don't fully understand the genetic disposition of who gets worsening illness. What may also be a factor is not only genetics but also the dose of the virus that you're exposed to. We know generally speaking that a healthy 25-year-old male should do better than many with this virus. But there's always the outliers that inexplicably don't do well. That's a scary component.

When might we see full indoor arena capacity again?

I think if we can achieve a high percentage of vaccine coverage along the lines of 70-80 percent vaccine coverage by the fall, that's a possibility. I don't see that happening soon, though.

The team I cover here in San Jose, the Sharks, were forced to relocate to Scottsdale, Ariz., for training camp due to local health restrictions. Yet there are no such restrictions for the Warriors one hour north in San Francisco. I think that's led to some confusion about why one county allows indoor sports, but another that's relatively close by, does not.

Well, this has been a problem with our whole COVID-19 response. We've not had a national strategy. We've left it to states, and then the states have kicked the can down to the counties, and so you get all of this inconsistency. This is one of the reasons why we've had problems with diagnostic testing, virus genome sequencing, now with vaccines. We're giving this to people that don't necessarily have the horsepower in order to manage an epidemic. Hopefully, we'll be able to fix that soon.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181213 Websites

The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Ringing in the new NHL season with some 2021 resolutions

By Sean McIndoe Dec 29, 2020 138

I have this post that I like to do every year right around the time that the NHL season is almost about to start, where I recognize a new beginning in the hockey world by suggesting some resolutions. Get it? It's funny, because they're new year's resolutions, but it's September.

Welp.

While 2020 will go down as the most messed up year in sports history, it's at least leaving hockey fans with a nice bit of symmetry. With camps opening over the coming days, we get to have our new season and our new year at pretty much the same time. That means I get to do this resolutions gimmick at the same time you're probably making the real thing. Or maybe you're not, and you're just planning to mark the end of 2020 the same way I am, by standing on your front porch at 11:59 p.m. screaming "GET OUT I HATE YOU" at the sky while your kids slowly inch back towards their rooms. We're all coping in our own ways, is what I'm saying.

Where was I? Oh right, new season's resolutions. As always, I'll be offering up a few suggestions for how all of us — fans and media, newbies and diehards — can do this hockey thing just a little bit better. You're welcome to pick and choose which ones might work for you. Maybe you already do a few of these, or you don't think you should. If so,



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that's fine. The main point is that we all have room for improvement, and far more importantly, 2020 can go screw.

Let's stop acting like a shot that hits the post is a lucky break for the goalie

I'll admit that I tend to pick on goalies. And rightly so, because they're all huge weirdos who've ruined entertaining hockey by getting way too good at their jobs. I'm telling you, kids, this sport was a happier place when the goalies were all 5-foot-3 and had to desperately wave their adorably tiny limbs around to make saves before falling over because somebody made them try to move sideways. Now they're all RVH cyborgs who wear the power armor from "Fallout" as equipment and who can add 10 points to their save percentage by learning how to hold their head at a slightly different angle in the offseason. I hate them.

But today, a peace offering to my goaltending friends: We need to stop pretending they got lucky when a shot hits the post.

We all do it. You'll hear about a goaltender getting a shutout, but then somebody chimes in with "Sure, but they gave up three posts." OK ... and? What does that have to do with anything? They stopped every shot that was going to go in the net, right? What's the problem?

It's especially weird since hockey fans generally hate the concept of luck. It's the one four-letter word you're not supposed to ever say at a hockey rink. You know the drill. Good teams make their own luck, good players just "find a way," it all evens out anyway, etc. Fair enough. But then a goaltender has a good game, and we all want to accuse them of being lucky.

If a player dekes a goalie out of his shorts but then fans on the open net, you could call that luck. If a sure goal is taken off the board because the referee mistakenly blew the play dead, sure, that's luck. If an ancestor of the bat from the 1975 Fog Game swoops down from the rafters just as the goalie is beaten clean on a slapshot and the puck hits it in mid-air, Randy Johnson style, and bounces harmlessly away, then absolutely, that would be luck.

But when a shot that wasn't going in doesn't go in? That's not luck. That's a shot that missed the mark. It's not a goalie's job to stop those. Tom Barrasso was right!

That's not to say that we shouldn't make note of shots that hit the post. Those are near-misses, and in a game of millimeters, like the modern NHL, they're important moments. But the goalie is responsible for keeping the puck out of a very specific 24-square foot space, and that's it. If they do that job for 60 minutes or more, that's all we can ask. So let's stop telling goalies they were just lucky when they weren't.

Let's stop being completely amazed when a player bats the puck out of the air

Confession: I am not good at hockey. I can skate. I've got a decent shot. I can occasionally pull off a few basic moves. But when I get out there at game speed, I can't put it all together. Everything is too fast. If I can find some time and space, maybe I can make a play. But when the game really gets going, even something simple like a pass into my skates makes my hockey brain do a guru meditation, and I'm useless.

In a weird way, that's actually a good thing, because it makes me appreciate what I see during an NHL game. Having tried it myself, I'm in awe of the stuff these guys can do out there. And I don't even mean the end-to-end rushes or crazy dekes or Michigan moves or whatever else makes the highlight reel. I'm amazed when a player at full speed can kick a puck in his skates up to his stick without even breaking stride, or float a perfect saucer pass over two opponents' sticks and onto his teammate's blade, or go top shelf in close from their backhand, or even just get a laser beam wrist shot off with seemingly zero windup or effort. After decades of trying, I can't do any of that stuff.

You know what I can do, at least occasionally? I can bat a puck out of the air.

It's not all that hard. It's not always easy, I'll grant you, and I'm sure it's even harder when a 220-pound NHL defenseman is closing in on you. But if you've ever played baseball or tennis or lacrosse or ping pong, hitting an object out of the air isn't all that inconceivable.

And yet every time an NHL player scores a goal by batting a puck out of the air, we all go nuts. I don't get it.

Some of those goals are admittedly cool. This one's ridiculous just for the distance, and I'll argue that this is one of the great goals in Cup final history. But this Sidney Crosby goal that everyone lost their minds over? Eh. It's a great play made at high speed. But NHL games are filled with great plays at high speed, many of which we don't seem all that impressed by. And stuff like this or this or this? For a professional athlete, that's just basic hand-eye coordination.

I'm not trying to say that I could score these goals. I couldn't, not at full NHL speed, and at my age I'd wind up in traction if I ever tried. But it's weird that we've got this one specific type of goal that we all seem to freak out over, when there are often more difficult and impressive plays made that period, if not on the same shift. We're a few years away from an NHL where every team has three guys doing stuff like this all the time, so let's stop being stunned that anyone can pull off a sacrifice bunt.

Let's give the new ads on helmets two weeks before we decide we hate them

I get it. The ads on helmets are new, and hockey fans aren't usually very accepting of new. I probably play the whole "things were better a few decades ago" card more than most, so I'm with you.

I'm also a realist, and the pandemic means the NHL desperately needs to tap into some new revenue streams. But more importantly, I've been doing this long enough that I remember when they first put ads on the ice. Hell, I vaguely recall the first ads showing up on the boards. And both times, I remember hearing people complain about how it was sacrilege. We were defacing the game with garish ads, selling out the purity of the sport for a few extra dollars. It was graffiti and we hated it.

And then ... we got used to it. Not even over decades or years. Pretty much immediately. Not all of us, obviously, but most of us. Do you ever go back and watch old NHL footage from the early 80s or before? The lack of advertising looks weird. You find yourself wondering why they're playing at your local community center.

If we can get used to giant ads on the ice in the neutral zone, we can probably get used to two-inch stickers on helmets. Or maybe we won't, and those things will find a way to bug us all year long. All I'm asking is that you give it at least a few weeks before you start complaining because I'm willing to bet that by that point, you won't even notice them anymore.

Let's settle down about tax rates in different markets

Did you know that some NHL teams are in states and provinces that have higher tax rates than others? I'm guessing you did, since you're a hockey fan, and you probably haven't been able to have a conversation about a signing, trade or other transaction without somebody breathlessly reminding you about it.

It's weird. Do tax rates matter? Sure they do. A dollar in Florida is not the same as a dollar in California, thanks to a big gap in state tax rates. If you play in Florida, more of your money goes into your own pocket. That matters a little to some players, and a lot to some others, especially the ones getting eight-figure deals.

For years, hockey fans (and media) pretty much ignored that, which wasn't smart. But at some point in the last few years, there was a shift, and the pendulum swung way too far in the other direction. Now, some of us act like tax rates are all that matter. And that's just as bad as not considering them at all, and probably worse.

I can't pinpoint exactly when the flip happened, but I have a suspect. I think it was when the Steven Stamkos bidding war of 2016 fizzled out at the last moment. Stamkos was days away from the open market when he



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decided to stay in Tampa for a relatively modest deal compared to what other teams were rumored to be ready to offer. Those other teams included his hometown Toronto Maple Leafs, as well as a Montreal Canadiens team that was desperate for a big-name UFA. Yet Stamkos shunned both, and decided to stay in Tampa at \$8.5 million per year over eight seasons. For a lot of fans up here, it made no sense. How could a good Canadian boy prefer to sit on a beach when he had the chance to come home and chase a Stanley Cup in a real hockey market?

There had to be an explanation. So when somebody mentioned that Tampa's tax rate was so much lower than Ontario and Quebec's, there was our answer. Never mind that the Lightning were a better team, with great ownership and strong management and beautiful weather and oh yeah, eight years of being the only NHL home Stamkos had ever known. It had to be the taxes. And suddenly, tax rates went from being an afterthought to the biggest single factor when it came to where players signed.

Or maybe not, and I'm overrating the impact of the Stamkos thing. The point remains: The difference between tax rates in different markets is just one factor of many, and these days lots of us are wildly overrating it.

Some teams are in high tax states and provinces, others are low. Some teams are contenders right now, others are rebuilding. Some teams play in cities where hockey is a religion and others play in places where it barely registers, and players might disagree over which of those scenarios is better. Some teams have the advantage of being close to your in-laws. Some teams have the advantage of being far from your in-laws. Arizona has golf. Colorado has skiing. San Jose has surfing. New York has great dining. Nashville has music. Vegas, I'm told, might have some stuff but I'm a good boy so I wouldn't know.

And if you play in Toronto or Montreal, yes, you'll pay higher taxes. You'll also get more endorsement opportunities, and if you have any success at all then you'll spend the rest of your life making easy money doing speeches on the banquet circuit and hosting golf tournaments, and people will name their kids after you and fight each other for the right to pay for your beer.

Every market has advantages and disadvantages. Any player with a choice of where they want to play will have to weigh all of it. Taxes will be part of that decision. But only part, and not as big a part as you've been led to believe, and certainly not as much as the base rates would imply. And if you don't believe me, you might prefer to hear it directly from an NHL player agent.

If you cheer for a team in a high-tax market, that's good news. And also bad news, because it means there may be other reasons why star players don't seem to want to sign with you. But I promise you, taxes don't have to be the very first thing you think about every time a decent player hits the market.

Let's just all agree that we can call the NHL's 2020-21 season "the 2021 season"

The hyphen in a season notation is annoying, right? It's an NHL thing, and also an NBA thing, and sometimes an NFL thing if you're a psychopath. But it's hard not to envy baseball, where a year is just a year, and you can just type four digits and be on with your day. No such luck in hockey, where we can't just ignore the first half of a league year.

But what if we could?

We've been through this before, because this is the NHL and at least one half-season interruption every decade or so is mandatory. The 1994-95 season didn't actually contain any 1994, and 2012 was long gone by the time the 2012-13 season rolled around. We should have just said "1995 season" and "2013 season". Some of us may have even half-heartedly tried to make that a thing, only to be cruelly smitten by our editors. OK, fine. Congratulations to the 1994-95 Devils for being the champions of a season that didn't play any games in 1994. Consistency matters, I guess, so we stick with tradition. We owe 1994 and 2012 some respect, after all.

But 2020? No. Screw 2020. It was terrible. And I'd really like to be able to stop typing it, because every time my fingers go "2020" by brain wants to autofill "was the worst year ever." I'd really like to stop doing that. And we can, because the coming seasons won't actually be 2020-21. It's just 2021.

So let's call it that. I don't know about you, but I could do with less 2020 in my life from here on out. Let's mark the new year by actually marking the new year, and flipping the double bird at the old one. Be it resolved, it's the 2021 season.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181214 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 3 bold Toronto Maple Leafs predictions for 2021

Luke Fox@lukefoxjokebox December 29, 2020, 1:56 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs will win the Canadian Division, and — finally! — a playoff round.

Auston Matthews will capture his first Maurice "Rocket" Richard Trophy. Morgan Rielly (hat tip to partner T.J. Brodie) will pile up enough points to leap back into the Norris conversation. And Toronto will trade its 2021 first-round pick to help its championship chances in 2022.

OK, now that we all agree on the easy stuff, let's dive into three bold (and probably way too specific) predictions for the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2021.

1. Andersen leaves, Hyman stays

When the tire-kickers cruised by the Maple Leafs' lot looking for a one-year lease, GM Kyle Dubas indeed listened to those inquiring about starting goaltender Frederik Andersen. Any buyer sniffing around power forward Zach Hyman, however, was told to take a hike.

Both are core members of the roster and its leadership group. Both are impending UFAs for the first time in their respective careers and will have great cases for a raise in pay.

The salary cap is as flat as the Earth was believed to be 3,000 years ago. The math will be tricky.

"I would love to stay in Toronto. It's where I grew up. I want to be a Leaf for a long time. That's first and foremost," said Hyman when last asked about his next contract. "I would love to be a long-term Leaf and would love to re-sign here and would love to be here and ultimately win a Stanley Cup here."

What did Andersen say on the same topic?

"Whatever's gonna happen, happens."

Hyman will be 29 when his next contract kicks in, but Toronto doesn't have many forwards of his ilk. He accepted a team-friendly deal last time (\$2.25-million cap hit) and the best bargain on the team deserves a significant upgrade in pay.

We say Hyman takes a little less AAV and a little more term to stick around, and Andersen becomes the odd man out.

How do the Leafs replace a top-10 goalie, then?

Well, if Jack Campbell doesn't emerge as an NHL starter, we're predicting Dubas goes hard after Arizona's Darcy Kuemper (UFA 2022) via trade.



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Kuemper, 30, is a \$4.5-million cap hit who will be due \$5.5 million in actual salary in 2021-22. The rebuilding Coyotes would rather not pay that, and the cash-flush Leafs would have no issue with doing so.

Dubas can trade futures to club starving for draft picks and acquire a true No. 1 to help Toronto in its contention window.

### 2. Tavares bounces back big time

After exploding for a career-best 47 goals, 88 points and plus-19 rating in 2018-19, his first campaign representing the logo on his boyhood pyjamas, John Tavares took a small but noticeable step backward in 2019-20.

The newly minted captain (and newly minted father) spent less time alongside playmaker Mitch Marner and more time pushing through multiple injuries (oblique, finger) that he downplayed well.

Hey, may we all suffer "off" years in which we put up 60 points in 63 games, win a career-best 55.3 per cent of our faceoffs, spend our spare time grinding through logistics on an important return-to-play committee, then absorb criticism for a contract that we rightfully earned.

Still, Tavares was a -7 last season, worst among Leafs forwards. For the first time in nine years, he didn't receive a single vote for the Hart, Selke or Lady Byng trophies.

Good news: Tavares's son, Jace, is walking now. And Jace's dad will be ready to run.

Here's betting J.T. returns to an 80-point pace and reminds the critics of the power of a one-two all-star punch up the middle of the ice.

### 3. Leafs lose Dermott, one way or another

To be honest, I take no joy in predicting this one.

Travis Dermott has one of the most genuinely upbeat spirits in the Leafs' dressing room. He's the type of guy you want to root for, regardless of the sweater on his back. But it was telling that the organization cut the 23-year-old defender's pay this off-season, signing him to a one-year, \$874,125 prove-it contract and importing competition for his ice time.

Is there danger in developing a smooth-skating defenceman for five years, winning a Calder Cup with him, and then letting him go right before his prime years? Absolutely.

That said, lefties Morgan Rielly, Jake Muzzin and T.J. Brodie are ensconced ahead of Dermott on the depth chart. That's the trio that must be protected in the Seattle expansion draft.

The franchise is high on emerging lefty Rasmus Sandin (still on his entry-level deal) behind him, and it appears KHL Defenceman of the Year Mikko Lehtonen will be given some of the prime offensive opportunities that, in an alternate universe, would've been earmarked for Dermott.

If the Kraken don't snag Dermott (RFA, no arbitration rights), Dubas could wheel Dermott in the summer as a compelling trade piece to a team more open to giving him a role that plays to his strengths.

To be honest, that may be the best outcome for both parties here.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181215 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens Training Camp Preview: How will the lineup come together?

Eric Engels@EricEngelsDecember 29, 2020, 11:59 AM

Much like the season to follow, this has the potential to be the most unique training camp we've ever witnessed—with the Montreal Canadiens trying to integrate two new top-six forwards, two new bottom-six forwards, two new defencemen and a new backup goaltender without the benefit of exhibition games.

You have to wonder how (if) they'll all come together in the 10 days that precede a 56-game sprint to the playoffs that starts with a six-game, cross-country road trip.

Will the Canadiens even have the benefit of everyone being healthy and eligible come Day 1 of camp? It's far from a guarantee.

Several players were late to arrive back in Montreal, with the NHL's return-to-play uncertain up until recently. Anyone who traveled from outside the country has to submit to a mandatory seven-day quarantine and produce four negative tests before being permitted on the ice, and given that COVID-19 is raging like a five-alarm fire across Europe, the United States and Canada, it's possible that some players could contract the virus in their travels.

How the Canadiens would deal with that reality is anybody's guess. We'll have to wait and see.

Meanwhile, there are some pertinent hockey questions that must be answered in camp—three of them, in particular, that stand out as the most pressing ones.

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Current Cap Space: -\$1.1 million

General manager: Marc Bergevin

Head coach: Claude Julien

Assistants: Dominique Ducharme, Luke Richardson, Kirk Muller

Unsigned players: None

### 1. Can Ryan Poehling steal a spot?

If you wrote Jake Evans into Montreal's lineup in pen, you may not believe Poehling can get in.

The wings are stacked and Evans is a step ahead in the race to the fourth-line centre role, so that's two strikes.

That Poehling can be sent to the taxi squad or American Hockey League without waivers is another reason against him earning a spot.

But we can't think of a player with more to prove than Poehling, and we have to believe he's beyond motivated to do it in the little time he has.

It's easy to forget the trajectory the 2017 first-rounder was on before he suffered a concussion in the middle of last year's training camp. Buoyed by the confidence of his incredible NHL debut in the final game of the 2018-19 season, when he scored a hat trick and added a goal in the shootout against Toronto, he was earning his way on to the roster. Then the injury hit and he never quite found his footing thereafter.

If Poehling's 27 games with the Canadiens last season were unremarkable, the 36 he played with the Laval Rocket, scoring just five goals and 13 points, were disappointing.

Still, he came to Phase 3 training camp in July with a chance to earn his way into some play-in/playoff action.

But it was evident right off the hop that Poehling wasn't prepared for that opportunity, and we can only imagine how he felt watching Evans, Alex Belzile and Charles Hudon dress for games while Poehling was relegated and locked into Black-Ace duty.



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We're even more interested in knowing how Poehling felt watching Jesperi Kotkaniemi go from probably not having a spot to taking Max Domi's place, and how he felt watching Nick Suzuki become Montreal's most productive centre in the bubble. If Poehling took the right lessons out of that experience, the door is wide open for him to author the biggest surprise at this training camp.

If the Lakeville, Minn., native has used his time off well—if he's gained a lot of muscle, improved his skating and focused himself on playing the power game that will better enable him to pierce through at the NHL level—he could be a threat.

Camp starts on Poehling's 22nd birthday and he could give himself the best gift of all by sprinting out of the gates.

Remaining Time -1:36

Can Nick Suzuki lead Canadiens in points next season? | Over/Under Canadiens Edition

### 2. Where will Alexander Romanov line up?

Assuming Romanov has already made the team, which isn't exactly an astronomical leap considering how everyone in the Canadiens' brass has talked up his ability, the focus will be on where he starts.

The 20-year-old, who turns 21 three days into training camp, is a smooth-skating, energetic player. It remains to be seen if there's much offence to his game, but consensus is that he's elite at killing plays and that he has a physical edge to his game that grabs your attention.

"He's a really competitive player," said Canadiens defence coach Luke Richardson on a recent Zoom call with media members. "We saw that on the first day, the first practice (in the bubble) he laid out a couple of our guys. We weren't expecting him to do that, but he's competitive. A no-apologies type of player."

Is Romanov a player who can jump right on to a pairing with Shea Weber?

Even if he has complementary skills to Weber's, it might be a bit much to expect Romanov to handle first-pairing minutes and play against the opposition's best forwards night-in, night-out before he's even dressed for an NHL game.

But what if the kid shows he's a step up from a third pair? Perhaps a place next to Jeff Petry isn't out of the question.

One thing is certain: If Romanov is immediately prepared to push players like Brett Kulak and Joel Edmundson down the depth chart, the Canadiens are going to be that much harder to play against.

And if he's just good enough to be a capable partner for either of those two players, the Canadiens will take that, too.

Remaining Time -1:31

How much will Canadiens lean on rookie Alexander Romanov? | Over/Under Canadiens Edition

### 3. How will the lines be assembled?

When we last spoke with Canadiens coach Claude Julien, on a Zoom call back on Oct. 22, he had a paper lineup in front of him that he chose to keep to himself.

"I can do (the lines) right away, but they'll probably change tomorrow," he said. "That's the nice thing about our forwards—we can move players around here and there and still have good lines. It's exciting; we have some depth and we have choices we can make as we go along—from game to game or even in the middle of a game. It gives our team more balance."

Even knowing that to be true, we're as curious as anyone to see what Julien's going to start with.

Where does he intend to plug in newcomers Tyler Toffoli and Josh Anderson?

Will Toffoli play his natural position at right wing, or will he shift over to the left?

Will Julien keep Tomas Tatar, Phillip Danault and Brendan Gallagher together?

Will he want to see Jonathan Drouin and Suzuki build on the chemistry they displayed together in the bubble?

Who out of Artturi Lehkonen, Paul Byron and Joel Armia gets a spot in the top-nine?

Where and how do Michael Frolik and Corey Perry fit in?

Even if Julien's excited to have the flexibility to mix things around and sees that depth and balance of his lineup as an advantage, he still needs to have the patience to allow chemistry to develop on his lines.

Up against the clock, with an abbreviated training camp and no pre-season games, how the coach manages that situation will be the most compelling story of these 10 days.

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1181216 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Thoughts on Mike Hoffman, moves by the Senators and Lightning

We're not quite at a moment worthy of Bob Cole's surely-eternal "Everything is happening!" line, but compared to the weeks we've spent wandering the entertainment desert here as hockey fans, it sure feels like a lot is happening right now. The moment the page was turned on Christmas, GMs and players everywhere dropped their focus into hockey gear, and off we've sped.

The World Juniors are under way, NHL trades have been made, contracts are being signed, and seven teams have training camps start in oh, less than 48 hours. So, let's take stock of where we're at here, and I'll give my thoughts on what's happened along the way.

The World Juniors

Hockey analysts with a statistical bent tend to caution against reading too much into small sample sizes, like say, a single hockey tournament. And fine, that's a worthwhile point – over a handful of hockey games a single player can get wildly lucky or unlucky with the bounces, and so their performance should always be taken with a grain of salt.

Still, though, certain players thrive like plants in a greenhouse under the bright spotlight while others wilt. Stats aside, their teammates can usually tell you which players are which. If you watch a tournament like this closely, then, you should be able to see for yourself – without checking the numbers – which players excelled.

This year, though, man, outside of noting which players are clearly head and shoulders above the rest (names like Dylan Cozens and Tim Stuetzle come to mind), how much can viewers really take away from the event? That's not saying it shouldn't exist, it'd just be insane to draw meaningful conclusions from this hockey. Canada beat Germany by two touchdowns, and then Germany proceeded to add players back from quarantine and ... won their next game in overtime? The Russians were just behind Canada as tournament favourites, and had a few players favoured to lead the whole event in scoring. So Russia came out in game one against the Czech Republic ... and got blanked?

It's always a weird (though enjoyable) event that leaves many prone to overreaction, and I'd say this year we're more susceptible to that than



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ever. We've been dying for hockey action, meanwhile some of these teams have had to quarantine, many have lost players and some lost coaches. The bulk of participants are coming into the event without a regular season to build on, while other players have been playing full tilt.

It's just a bunch of uber-talented young players trying to find their competitive footing in their career's weirdest season under the brightest of spotlights, and so that context should be important in giving analysis.

Montreal signs Corey Perry, reinforcing my belief that coaching is going to be of utmost importance in the Canadian division

When I look at the North Division, I can squint and see six playoff teams (I like Winnipeg more than most), and a team that could be better than most expect (Ottawa). Unfortunately, only four of these teams will get playoff spots, meaning points are going to be tough to come by, and none will be handed out for free. There is no lifting the plastic mouth of the 2018-19 Detroit Red Wings Pez dispenser to easily grab your two-point candy.

This is all going to be made worse by the NHL's insane point system that awards varying amounts of points per game (two for some, but three if it's a super-duper close one!) that consciously scorns merit in favour of league-wide hope, meaning just about everyone is going to still be in the fight until the end, particularly over just 56 games.

I mentioned Corey Perry off the top because he's just what Montreal needed, and suddenly that team looks awfully competitive to me. (I wasn't as sold on them as others, but Coolbet's odds currently have them as the second most-likely team to win the division.) Anyway, the Perry signing reinforced my thoughts about the tough division, which led me to coaching.

With a compressed schedule, which coach can get his team motivated for that fifth game in seven nights, when it's the third time playing the same team in the same location in front of no fans? Which coach can get his team motivated to dig in for more after a win when the puck drops against the same opponent 22 hours later? Which coach, over this tight timeline, can find enough rest for their stars so they can maximize their roster's ability?

It's going to be a grind, which puts a lot of the onus here on the staff to keep the players primed.

Sure, go take Ottawa's two points, you just gotta let 'em punch you in the nose first

I mentioned Ottawa as the clear odd-man out in their seven-team division, but it looks to me like coach DJ Smith spoke with GM Pierre Dorion after last season and came up with a clear mandate heading into this season: maybe we won't be the best team in the division, and maybe we'll hand out two points most nights, but darn it, it won't be fun to take them.

Since last season ended the Senators have added Erik Gudbranson, Josh Brown, Cedric Paquette, Austin Watson and Braydon Coburn. None of those guys are pure enforcers, but all are competitive and physical and a bit mean.

My guess here is that Ottawa is working on developing a number of bright young prospects, and they want those players to feel confident they can push the boundaries of their opponents without having to worry about receiving excessive liberties. I'm guessing they want to field pros who set an example by bringing it every night. I'm guessing that if these prospects are going to lose along their learning curve, they don't want it to be in a meek, embarrassing way.

I don't exactly know what the Ottawa Senators will be this season, though my hunch is still not very good. But I certainly don't think they're going to roll over for anyone.

Julien BriseBois deserves some sort of award, like say, the GM one

I know the Lightning, and specifically head coach Jon Cooper, enjoyed having Cedric Paquette in their lineup, and they consider him a

contributing part of the Stanley Cup they just won. But losing him is not franchise crippling, and that the Lightning only lost him and Coburn given what many expected to happen just months ago...this has been some superb maneuvering by Tampa Bay's GM.

Now, here's the part where you say "Well sure, but they were aided (salary-wise) by Nikita Kucherov going to long-term IR," and of course that's true. But I'm not ready to say this timing is all blind "luck" yet. It seems to me Kucherov could've gone under the knife a while ago and been back in-season, so perhaps the plan is to wait to be back in time for the playoffs, when the salary cap disappears. If that's the case, Tampa could effectively be bringing back last year's dominant Cup-winning team plus Steven Stamkos for another go, thanks to some clever managing work.

In any case, what looked to be a crisis for the Lightning now looks more like a multi-month inconvenience, provided Kucherov recovers well and right when they expect him.

Mike Hoffman ran up against some rough luck, but made a smart choice

If this was the year you became an NHL free agent and you were looking at your options, the only smart thing to do was put yourself in a good situation, because this wasn't the year you were going to get paid. It had to be about positioning yourself to make the most money after it. I think Hoffman did the best job of that of anyone this off-season, as much as he's likely getting clipped on the short-term money end (likely a one-year deal for \$4.5 million or thereabouts).

He's on a good team with the Blues, which goes a lot farther to helping stats than we appreciate. Further to that, having a good D-corps helps forwards pile up numbers more than is often recognized. Also having soft opponents in your division doesn't hurt, and the Blues will have that.

St. Louis needs help putting the puck in the net, meaning Hoffman is going to get the linemates, the ice time, and the special teams opportunities to score. If he stays healthy, it's not hard to see him putting away 20-25 goals in a short year and getting a multi-year deal this off-season. And given what's out there right now, that's about the best a talented UFA could hope to do.

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1181217 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff predicts big things for Patrik Laine in 2021

Ken Wiebe@WiebesWorldDecember 29, 2020, 7:54 PM

WINNIPEG -- Kevin Cheveldayoff most definitely brought his deflection game to the table.

But if you listened carefully enough, the general manager of the Winnipeg Jets also provided a couple of clues and then delivered a prediction when it comes to the subject that has dominated the headlines during the off-season as he held a Zoom call with reporters on Tuesday afternoon.

With training camp set to open on Sunday at BellMTS Iceplex, Cheveldayoff has one restricted free agent left to sign in forward Jack Roslovic.

And while the quarantine rules in place mean that Roslovic (who remains back home training in Columbus, Ohio) won't be on the ice for the start of training camp, the expectation is that a new contract is eventually going to get done.



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"Obviously, he is an RFA and currently not signed," said Cheveldayoff. "To my knowledge, he is also currently not in Winnipeg, so moving forward there is going to be a quarantine situation, whenever we come to an agreement."

Cheveldayoff didn't say if the Jets come to an agreement with Roslovic, the emphasis was on when and that was by design.

When pressed further about the pace of negotiations, Cheveldayoff would not take the bait.

"We made our qualifying offers back when everyone made their qualifying offers," said Cheveldayoff. "And as far as the cadence of a conversation or the contents of a meeting, I've always had the belief and the way I've conducted business (is) that that's been kept private."

Remaining Time -1:37

Roslovic shouldn't expect to be traded unless price is right for Cheveldayoff

Roslovic is coming off a career-year in terms of production but doesn't currently have a lot of leverage -- especially in a flat salary cap world and without the ability to go to arbitration.

It's no secret that Roslovic would prefer to see his role enhanced and to move permanently onto one of the top two lines.

Although there have been some cameo appearances higher in the lineup, Roslovic is projected to open the campaign on the checking line with Adam Lowry and Andrew Copp -- provided his contract is signed in time.

It's natural for a player to want to carve out a bigger chunk of the pie, but there is a risk involved for Roslovic when it comes to digging in his heels.

If he misses too much time -- either in training camp or in the regular season -- there could be an opportunity for someone like Mason Appleton or Jansen Harkins to move past him on the depth chart.

Roslovic isn't the only Jets forward whose name has been subject to trade winds blowing around him.

He's been on the undercard compared to Patrik Laine, whose representatives went public with comments suggesting it would be in the best interest of both parties to go their separate ways.

Cheveldayoff wouldn't speculate on how the situation would sort itself out, though he made it clear he's expecting big things from the Finnish forward this season.

"I tried to do my job this summer in looking at all the different options to improve our team and I think we have done that," said Cheveldayoff, noting the addition of players like Paul Stastny, Derek Forbort and Nate Thompson. "As far as with Patrik, again, I assume he's probably going to have one of the best years of his career given the group of players that we have and the professionalism that is there. And the maturity level that all players gain year over year over year, I think just helps us move forward."

Remaining Time -1:00

Does Laine starting season with Jets mean he's happy in Winnipeg?

Before you think the Jets could carry the torch as Team Turmoil during the coming weeks, consider what the team was dealing with in training camp in September of 2019.

On the day before camp, the Jets' most impactful defenceman, Dustin Byfuglien, arranged for a meeting with Cheveldayoff and asked for a personal leave of absence.

Byfuglien never returned and the two sides mutually terminated the final two years of his contact in April.

If trying to forge a path without Byfuglien wasn't tough enough at the time, the Jets went through an entire training camp with two of its top goal-scorers in Laine and Kyle Connor.

Both players eventually agreed to terms and didn't miss any time during the regular season, though an argument could easily be made that they were playing catch-up and needed some time to get up to speed before fully hitting their stride.

This year, goalie prospect Mikhail Berdin could miss a couple of days because it took a bit longer to get him out of Russia due to some flight logistics after playing in the KHL, centre David Gustafsson may potentially skip a few on-ice sessions as he continues to heal after suffering an injury while playing in Sweden and Roslovic remains in a contract stalemate. Those are all small potatoes compared to last year.

"I think we're past the point of outside things distracting our team," said Jets forward Andrew Copp, who spoke with reporters via Zoom on Tuesday afternoon. "Whether it was guys in the past who have not had contracts at this time, going into camp, there have been situations left and right, it feels like. So we're kind of past the point of letting outside distractions worry our team."

"So we're just trying to get going, get all together on the first day of training camp, get practicing and start to build that team feeling, that camaraderie and get ready to go for the regular season. I don't think any outside news or rumours or whatever is going to (have) any sort of impact on our team."

How do the Jets expect to stack up in the North Division?

"I guess we're going to find out," said Copp. "We've had some new additions, hopefully some guys continue to take some more steps. Having the Vezina winner in net is always a good place to start so I mean, it's going to be a very competitive division. You can kind of look at the teams, one through seven, and no matter what way it shakes out, you wouldn't be overly surprised."

"Every night it's going to be a battle. There are great players on each team, players you're going to have to be aware of. So we're looking forward to the challenge and obviously, we're going to get to know each other pretty well over the next five months."

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1181218 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / For Oilers' Ethan Bear, focus remains on winning after signing contract

Mark Spector@sportsnetspec December 29, 2020, 4:46 PM

EDMONTON — Why do you want Ethan Bear on your team? Well, there are a lot of reasons, actually.

Said Oilers head coach Dave Tippett: "He's smart, has good skill and he competes. Those are three pretty good attributes."

Then there's this:

Asked about how his approach to training camp changes year over year — from a rookie with an outside chance of making the team, to having signed a two-year, \$4 million contract and expecting top-four minutes — Bear had this to say.

"I want to win. That will be what I am focused on mostly — doing whatever I can to help the team win," Bear said Tuesday, making the drive to Edmonton from Kelowna where he had been skating with some



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fellow pros. "We haven't done anything yet. We haven't won, or anything. We didn't even make the playoffs last year, technically.

"Ya, I've got a year under my belt. But the biggest thing is winning now."

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Some guys sign a new deal and are ready to celebrate by pumping their own tires. Admittedly, it's us media people asking them the leading questions, but you can learn a lot about a players' priorities by watching where they swing the interview.

Coming out of his entry-level deal and with no real leverage, for Bear to more than double his average-annual value from just under \$800,000 to \$2 million is a nice raise — especially considering the salary landscape in the NHL these days. That he didn't sign long-term is, again, simply a facet of the current economy.

But Bear wasn't talking about future long-term deals, or about how a Cree kid who grew up in the Ochapowace nation just signed a life-changing deal worth \$4 million.

What Bear is focused on is playing on a winner in Edmonton — full stop. He wasn't even worried about getting the contract signed, so much.

"The only thing I was worried about was missing camp. I really want to be there, and I'm happy (the contract) is done now. Especially with this short season," said the 23-year-old.

He still has that taste in his mouth from the qualifying round loss to the Chicago Blackhawks. An Oilers team that was two points out of having a bye, that had home-ice in round one virtually locked up before the pause, got blown out in four games by the 12th place Blackhawks. It was a sour summer for the boys in orange.

"We'd done a lot of good work last year, and put ourselves in a great spot to make the playoffs. Then with the pause, getting beat out by Chicago in the qualifying round was very upsetting. I definitely still have that chip on my shoulder," Bear said. "We need to show that we ARE a winning team. We've got too many good players to lose like that. We have a lot to prove. I want to make sure we have that winning mentality."

His head coach loves Bear's outlook on life.

"When Bearsy got the deal done Monday night," Dave Tippett said on Tuesday, "I told him, 'Come to camp with that same smile, that same fun attitude that says you're enjoying being here. Put all the business stuff behind you and get back to where you were last year in camp.'

"That's when he made our team. He came here full of life, he played with energy, and he played himself on to the team."

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When Adam Larsson went down with a busted ankle in the season opener, Bear went from a longshot who snuck on to the roster to a top-four defenceman who had to make up some minutes on the right side. Bear would go on to partner up with Darnell Nurse, and lead all rookie D-men in total ice time, even strength ice time, and average ice time per game.

He had five goals and 21 points, and finished 10 in voting for the Calder Memorial Trophy (Rookie of the Year). He'll likely be back on Nurse's flank again when camp opens on Monday.

"We'll probably look at that for sure, and with a short camp you're going to try to get a much familiarity as you can early on," Tippett said. "But we have to figure out where all the parts fit. We have Bear, Larsson, Tyson Barrie on the right side — and Bouch (Evan Bouchard) is going to be pushing. And on the left side you've got Klef (injured Oscar Klefbom) out, but you've got Nursey, and (Caleb) Jones, and (Kris) Russell, and (Slater) Koekkoek, and (William) Lagesson... There are lots of options there.

"We've got to see where things play out, but I guarantee, you're going to need a lot more than your top-four defencemen this year. You'll need eight or nine guys who can play, and that's what we feel like we have."

As for the contract, like the player himself, the deal is good and leaves room for much improvement down the road.

When Tampa signed right-handed defenceman Erik Cernak to a three-year deal with an AAV of \$2.95 million just last week, it looked like the market for Bear could be a little rich for capped out Oilers GM Ken Holland. But shaving off a year and almost a million in AAV was the solution that brought everyone together.

When this short deal expires, Bear will have arbitration rights with a \$2.4 million qualifying offer, and he'll be two years out from unrestricted free agency.

By then, he hopes, he'll be re-signing with a winner.

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1181219 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets Training Camp Preview: Where does Laine slot in?

Ken Wiebe@WiebesWorldDecember 29, 2020, 9:44 AM

WINNIPEG - It's a clean sheet in front of them, but what are the Winnipeg Jets going to do with it?

It's been nearly five months since the Jets were bounced from the Stanley Cup Playoffs qualifying round in four games by the Calgary Flames.

The stay-in-the-fight mantra Winnipeg adopted during a season filled with adversity was there right until the final buzzer, but the goal well ran relatively dry and it was nearly impossible to overcome the loss of three forwards - Mark Scheifele, Patrik Laine and Mason Appleton - to injury in the series opener.

Despite all of the lessons the Jets were able to learn during what was an arduous process, the ability to turn the page on the 2019-20 campaign is accompanied by both optimism and curiosity of what direction the organization is heading in.

With one restricted free agent left to sign, the Jets are already one of 10 teams that are over the \$81.5 million salary cap ceiling - though there will be some significant relief coming once veteran centre Bryan Little is placed on LTIR.

Two full seasons removed from a trip to the Western Conference, the Jets have a Vezina-winning goalie, a skilled core of forwards and an unheralded, but capable defence corps that is not subject to the same roster churn it was in September of 2019.



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What does that add up to as the Jets move from the meat grinder that is the Central Division to the Group of Seven (North) Division?

Before the Jets begin their chaotic 115-day sprint to the finish line on this 56-game regular season with a home game against the Flames, there are some important questions to chew on as training camp opens on Jan. 3.

Current Cap Space: -\$722,885

GM: Kevin Cheveldayoff (10th season)

Head coach: Paul Maurice (7th full season)

Assistants: Jamie Kompon, Charlie Huddy, Dave Lowry, Wade Flaherty (goalie coach), Matt Prefontaine (video coach)

Unsigned players: Jack Roslovic (RFA)

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

1. Where does Laine slot in?

After an off-season filled with trade rumours and innuendo surrounding an eventual breakup, Laine figures to be in the spotlight when training camp opens.

Since he hasn't spoken to members of the media since July 31, reporters will be looking for clues from Laine -- whether it's in his tone, his words or his body language. That first Zoom call could provide a few signs about his mindset.

Laine rarely lacks motivation and as he heads into the final year of the bridge deal he signed in September of 2019, the Finnish sniper fully realizes the best way to enhance his value is to take another step forward.

If he's in the discussion for the Rocket Richard Trophy and produces at a point-per-game level for the first time in his career -- and is able to carry over the strides he made in his play away from the puck -- he's going to cash in on his next deal, even if the salary cap remains flat.

In terms of training camp storylines, since there are no exhibition games, all eyes will be on the line combinations Jets head coach Paul Maurice tests out.

Does he simply go back to what has worked in the past -- with Paul Stastny in the middle of Laine and Nikolaj Ehlers -- or is Laine given another shot to work with top-line centre Scheifele?

No matter who Laine is playing with, he's going to be given a prominent role in the top-six and he remains a triggerman on a power play that is looking to return to top-5 in the NHL level.

Laine scored just eight of his 28 goals with the man-advantage last season and increasing that number is a priority.

Training camp may also provide a few hints on any wrinkles the Jets might unveil on the power play, but finding a way to capitalize on Laine's quick release and heavy shot figures to be part of the game plan.

Remaining Time -2:35

How many more games will Patrik Laine play in a Jets uniform?

2. Is Scheifele back to full health?

The main man in the middle was limited to only three shifts against the Flames, exiting the series with a suspected high-ankle sprain after an awkward hit from Matthew Tkachuk.

Scheifele has been back on the ice for several months, so there isn't really a concern about whether or not his body has fully recovered.

His ability to produce after generating offence at a point-per-game level for the past four seasons isn't in question either.

However, Scheifele's hungry to take his all-around game to the next level and there's no better way to do that than to go up against the likes of reigning Hart Trophy winner Leon Draisaitl, Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and John Tavares for nine times a season to get a gauge on how you stack up.

Plus, Scheifele wants to be part of Canada's entry at the 2022 Olympics and that evaluation process is going to begin immediately.

The Jets need Scheifele to be their most impactful skater and you can bet he's going to spend this season trying to make up for lost time.

3. Which rookie will have the biggest impact?

Last season, 2015 second-rounder Jansen Harkins vaulted from fringe status to full-time NHLer, appearing in 27 games during the regular season and three more in the playoffs (where he notched an impressive goal).

Remaining Time -0:44

Jansen Harkins scores first playoff goal for Jets

Harkins is destined to be on the roster, but is still working to carve out a bigger role for himself.

The bigger opportunities to contribute are located on the blue line, where 2019 first-rounder Ville Heinola and 2017 second-rounder Dylan Samberg will be looking to break in.

Derek Forbort is expected to slot in on the second pairing with Neal Pionk, but the top two defence prospects are eager to show that they're ready to push for NHL action.

Heinola appeared in seven games with the Jets last season and while his offensive game was evident from the outset, he needed to mature physically and continue to work on his defensive play.

Heinola, a slick puck mover with impressive instincts, is suiting up in his third World Junior Hockey Championship and figures to be feeling confident coming into his second NHL training camp.

Samberg completed his junior season at the University of Minnesota-Duluth in March and is set to make his pro debut.

He's a big, mobile stay-at-home defenceman that can play with an edge. His physical maturity should allow him to compete for an NHL job immediately, though getting some seasoning in the minors is a distinct possibility.

If they can't crack the top-six out of camp, it's important for the development of Heinola and Samberg to be seeing game action, likely in the American Hockey League.

Cole Perfetti, who was chosen 10th overall in the 2020 NHL Draft, is the top forward prospect, though he's going to face some stiff competition to earn a spot on the opening-day roster.

Perfetti, who is suiting up for Team Canada at the world junior in Edmonton, is also a candidate to spend some time on the taxi squad - especially since the Ontario Hockey League has delayed the start of the season indefinitely.

The sleeper candidate in the forward category is left-winger Kristian Vesalainen, the Jets first round pick in 2017, while David Gustafsson will be in the mix for the fourth-line centre job with veteran Nate Thompson.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL's top 7 RFAs still unsigned: Latest rumours, reports



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 30, 2020

Luke Fox@lukefoxjukebox December 29, 2020, 8:45 AM

15

OK, time to start sweating.

All 31 NHL training camps are set to open on Jan. 3 — less than a week away — and yet several key restricted free agents are still in need of a contract.

The announcement of the league's 2021 schedule spurred a flurry of Christmastime action, with notable RFAs like Anthony Cirelli, MacKenzie Blackwood and Ethan Bear putting pen to paper.

As camp approaches, here is a rundown of the top unsigned RFAs and the latest reports surrounding their future as the game of chicken with their GMs heats up.

To be eligible to play in the 2020-21 season, RFAs must be signed by Feb. 11.

More from Sportsnet

10 bold NHL predictions for 2021

Luke Fox

Matthew-Tkachuk

Canadian Division Power Rankings: Who's the best in the land?

Luke Fox

1. Mathew Barzal

Age: 23

Position: Centre

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$863,333

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: Franchise player. More points (60) and points per game (0.88) than any other impending RFA, despite playing in a system that accentuates defence. Skates more than 20 minutes a night. Three consecutive 60-point seasons and three seasons as the Isles' top scorer. Racked up 85 points in his rookie season. Pivots faster than a politician. Gutsy playoff performance through four rounds.

The latest: On March 21, GM Lou Lamoriello sent a message to any GM thinking of floating an offer sheet Barzal's way. Lamoriello was asked by a fan if he'd match any competitive contract offer for his top centreman.

"It is our intention to not allow it to get to that point, but should that happen, the answer is yes," Lamoriello replied.

The slick skater raised eyebrows in September when he told Arthur Staple of The Athletic that he'd be interested in seeing an offer sheet signed by a member of 2019's loaded RFA class.

"I wouldn't mind seeing someone shake up the league a little bit. That would be fun. Maybe see an offer sheet tossed around," Barzal mused.

Barzal and the Islanders have been in no great rush to settle his next deal, which should be a juicy one.

Lamoriello is nearing the end of a tricky off-season with \$3.9 million in projected cap space.

He'd still love to bring in an elite winger to finish off Barzal's passes, but after extending RFA defenceman Ryan Pullock, there was not much room to wiggle.

Until expensive defenceman Johnny Boychuk announced the end of his NHL career on Nov. 25.

In order to free cap space (and guard against offer sheets) earlier this off-season, Lamoriello was prompted to trade unsigned RFA Devon Toews to Colorado for a pair of picks.

"Whenever we're ready to sit down and get it done, I'd love for that to happen," Barzal said of his next contract. "At the same time, I'm not a person that's just going to rush this thing or get nervous about it or whatever. I'm just going about my day, and it'll happen when it happens."

Per Empire Sports, Lamoriello is looking to lock up Barzal in the ballpark of \$7.5 million per season. Barzal's camp, naturally, would prefer a higher figure — but a recent report by Andrew Gross suggests Barzal, like Pullock, is considering a team-friendly deal to keep the band together.

If Barzal were to sign an offer sheet worth \$10.9 million or more per season, the compensation to the Islanders would be four first-round picks. That feels highly unlikely.

2. Pierre-Luc Dubois

Age: 22

Position: Centre

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$894,166

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: Was on pace for his third-straight 20-goal season. Leads all Blue Jackets in assists (31) and points (49). Raised game in playoffs, with eight points through his first eight games. Cap space is not an issue in Columbus.

The latest: Generally, if you're lucky enough to draft and develop a 22-year-old No. 1 centreman, you pay the man when his contract comes due.

Dubois exploded for a 61-point campaign skating mostly alongside the all-world Artemi Panarin, but even in the Bread Man's absence, the big-bodied Quebecer has driven offence for an organization that needs all it can get.

"If he wants to be a difference-maker, a game-changer, one of the best players in the league, he has all the capabilities, all the tools," said winger Cam Atkinson.

Jarmo Kekalainen has cap space but some work to do with Dubois. Columbus's GM indicated to the Columbus Dispatch in late October that extension talks with Dubois' agent, Pat Brisson, had stalled.

"It's funny how everyone's worried about RFAs, because I'm not worried at all," Kekalainen said. "They get done when they get done."

The GM said the two sides have not spoken "in a while."

"The (Zach) Werenski contract got done right before training camp last year," Kekalainen reminded. "Why should there be any worry? I'm not worried."

In mid-December, talks between Kekalainen and Dubois's agent, Pat Brisson, picked up. The GM asserted it was a priority to sign his top centre before camp opens on Jan. 3.

3. Vince Dunn

Age: 24

Position: Defence

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$722,500

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: Gamer. Stanley Cup champion. Plus-30 defenceman over his career. Hit 35 points as a sophomore. Blues defensive depth took a hit with Alex Pietrangelo walking. Offensive flair. Positive possession metrics.



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The latest: Despite letting their captain seek his money elsewhere, the Blues are still hard up against the cap with Dunn unsigned.

The landscape isn't financially benefitting third-pairing defencemen these days, even ones with as much potential as Dunn, who is coming off a down year statistically and has been given the benefit of starting most shifts in the O-zone.

Coach Craig Berube has felt safer trusting his more experienced defencemen, and GM Doug Armstrong should draw a hard line in negotiations with a player who lacks arbitration rights.

This has short-term bridge written all over it.

Armstrong informed the St. Louis Dispatch that both sides are content to wait until closer to training camp to finalize an extension. Placing Vladimir Tarasenko and the retired Alex Steen on long-term injured reserve will help free the cap space necessary to ink Dunn.

#### 4. Jesper Bratt

Age: 22

Position: Left wing

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$749,167

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: Member of Sweden's senior national team. Career-high 16 goals in shortened 2019-20. Three seasons of 30-plus points despite never appearing in more than 74 games. Adds offensive punch to a lineup in great need of it.

The latest: The Devils have no cap concerns, so finding the money for suitable raises a young, emerging forward like Bratt is worthy of should be of little concern.

Although New Jersey isn't expected to spend to the cap, there is some leeway here, depending on GM Tom Fitzgerald's preference, to work out either a long-term or short-term extension.

Bratt is still a year away from arbitration eligibility and projects to be an important piece of the Devils' top six in 2021.

And yet... Bratt was still training in Europe around Christmastime.

"Right now, I'd say it would be hard-pressed to think Jesper Bratt will be in training camp because of all the obstacles we'd have to go over with quarantine and immigration," Fitzgerald told the Two-Man Advantage podcast on Dec. 23.

"But Jesper wants to be in New Jersey. That's the bottom line."

#### 5. Dylan Strome

Age: 23

Position: Centre

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$863,333

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: Put up 0.66 points per game. Back-to-back seasons with a minimum of 38 points. Averaged nearly 16 minutes per night. Belief that his most productive seasons are still ahead. Chicago has plenty of cap space, relatively speaking.

The latest: With the Blackhawks broadcasting that they're firmly in rebuild mode, keeping a young centreman with offensive upside in the fold is probably a wise idea.

The jury is still out, however, regarding the heights Strome can climb. Is he a top-six piece of the future?

With arbitration rights still a year away, Strome has little leverage on a long-term deal, so a bridge would be the prudent move for both sides.

GM Stan Bowman said on Dec. 18 that negotiations were ongoing and that he was optimistic a deal would get done. Later, on Dec. 26, Bowman signed UFA centreman Carl Soderberg for a \$1 million bargain.

#### 6. Luke Kunin

Age: 23

Position: Right wing / Centre

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$925,000

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: First-round pick. Top-six expectations. Set career highs in games played (63), goals (15) and assists (16) in 2019-20. Scored twice in four playoff games. Nashville traded fan favourite Nick Bonino to Minnesota to acquire his rights.

The latest: Nashville GM David Poile has high hopes for the recently acquired Kunin and will place him in an offensive role.

"He's going to play on the power play, he's going to kill penalties, and he can play up and down your lineup at centre ice or on the wing," Poile told 102.5 FM after trading respected veteran Bonino for the young forward.

"[Kunin] is 10 years younger, and for a team that was a little bit older, I think it's a really good change. I think he's equally, if not a better fit, than what we had."

Kunin has yet to ink an extension with his new club but sounds upbeat about his opportunity.

"I definitely think I have the talent to play with some very skilled players like they have and help them have success offensively," he said.

#### 7. Jack Roslovic

Age: 23

Position: Centre / Right wing

2019-20 salary cap hit: \$894,166

Arbitration rights: No

Bargaining chips: First-round pick. Multiple gold medalist as star for Team USA on the international stage as a teenager. Posted career bests in goals (12), assists (17) and points (29) in 2019-20 despite seeing primarily bottom-six usage. Top-six potential.

The latest: The Jets currently have a projected cap space of zero dollars with which to sign their final restricted free agent. (That said, Bryan Little may be moved to Winnipeg's long-term injured reserve list and thus provide some relief.)

Kevin Cheveldayoff's lack of financial wiggle room has sparked a cottage industry of trade rumours around before-their-prime players like Roslovic, the recently re-upped Sami Niku and superstar Patrik Laine (RFA 2021).

In November, the Winnipeg Sun ran a poll to gauge fans' preferred trade piece, and 60 per cent of participants were open to cutting bait with Roslovic. The RFA has put up a respectable 26 goals and 67 points in 180 NHL games while seldom seeing top-six action.

The Jets have reportedly shopped Roslovic this off-season, targeting a top-four, left-side defenceman in return.

The other unsigned RFAs: Dmytro Timashov, Vladislav Kamenev, Lawrence Pilut, Aleksii Saarela, Henrik Borgstrom, Peter Cehlarik, Jonathan Dahlen, Oliver Kaski, Emil Djuse, Tony Sund, Dominik Masin

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 30, 2020

TSN.CA / Canada's Schneider sticking to his style in return from suspension

By Mark Masters

Braden Schneider played just four shifts on Boxing Day before being ejected for a hit to the head on German forward Jan-Luca Schumacher. The Brandon Wheat Kings defenceman was suspended one game and missed Sunday's win over Slovakia.

"I wasn't, honestly, too surprised," he said. "I know with the IIHF they take head shots very seriously, as they should, and I was kind of expecting one and I think I got what I deserved."

Hitting is part of Schneider's DNA as a hockey player. He studied Scott Stevens bodychecks on YouTube as a kid and views Shea Weber as his National Hockey League role model. But the Rangers' first-rounder admits he needs to recalibrate his physical play to avoid further issues at the World Juniors.

"I caught him a little higher than I would have liked," Schneider explained. "I wasn't meaning to do that by any means ... You got to go and calculate it a little bit better. I could have done some things different. I could have led with my stick and made sure I got all the guy, but it happens and it's a quick game so you're bound to make a couple mistakes."

— IIHF (@IIHFHockey) December 27, 2020

Schneider was playing in only his second real game since March and getting the timing down on hits is tricky, especially when there's a significant size difference. Schneider is 6-foot-2 and Schumacher is listed at 5-foot-9.

"It was a matter of size in that situation," said head coach Andre Tourigny. "I respect the decision, but at the same time I think it's a hockey play and I don't want him to change his style."

Schneider was back in his regular spot opposite Thomas Harley at Monday's practice.

Despite his big-hitting nature, Schneider has avoided supplemental discipline during most of his Western Hockey League career with only one suspension, one game for kneeling in November 2019, on his record.

"I'm still going to play the game I like to play," Schneider said. "I play with an edge. I'm hard to play against. That's part of my identity and that's why I made this team. I'll be a little bit smarter and pick my places a little bit better, but I'm not going to change my identity as a player."

Schneider won't change his physical nature after suspension

Braden Schneider was suspended one-game for his high hit on Germany's Jan-Luca Schumacher. The Canadian admits he couldn't've played things a bit safer but won't be changing anything about his game and is eager to return to action tonight against Switzerland.

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Schneider isn't the only Canadian defenceman looking for a big hit. Bowen Byram laid out Slovakia's Jakub Kolenic at Canada's defensive blue line in the second period of Sunday's game.

"He's a smart player and a strong guy and when he can make those reads I love seeing a nice hit like that," observed Schneider. "He's a guy who can do it all and to see him bringing that physical element along with what he can do with the puck is pretty good to see."

"Strength is definitely a big thing," said Byram. "From last year to this year I definitely feel a big difference so it's a lot easier to feel confident making those plays when you feel strong and good on your skates."

Byram with a BIG hit 🤪 [pic.twitter.com/lkpB1NyEZA](https://pic.twitter.com/lkpB1NyEZA)

— TSN (@TSN\_Sports) December 28, 2020

Byram has focused on improving his defensive game and notes that spending time in the NHL bubble this summer and skating with Colorado's elite forwards helped him become more well-rounded.

"You learn pretty quickly how to try and defend those guys," he said. "You don't like to get burnt so you try and figure it out as best you can and I feel like being physical is a way to do that."

"Everyone talks about Bowen Byram as an offensive defenceman, but he's way more than that," said Tourigny. "He's a good defender. He's good to play physical. He's strong on the puck. He's strong in his battles, can play against any type of player and, for sure, his skating ability is still on top of the list."

Trying to defend Avs' superstars forced Byram to quickly develop his physical play

Bowen Byram is known as an offensive defenceman, but Andre Tourigny has noticed his physical play take a big step in his development. The Avalanche draft pick admits he learned quickly that defending players like Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen required a lot more physicality.

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Canada's power play failed to convert on two opportunities against the Slovaks and remains "a work in progress," according to Byram, who quarterbacks the top unit.

"Whenever you're together with a new group of guys it takes some time so we're working hard on it," Byram said. "It's definitely a big challenge for us tonight."

The first unit features a couple of guys in unfamiliar positions. Peyton Krebs, who scored a buzzer-beater on the power play against Germany, had never played the bumper spot before joining Team Canada. He's been studying video of Patrice Bergeron and Brayden Point in the lead up to the event.

Cozens has moved to the net-front spot since Kirby Dach got hurt. He also played there at last year's World Juniors, but not in the WHL.

"I learned to like that spot a lot so I'm definitely very comfortable in front," Cozens said. "I think my big body helps in positioning myself to screen the goalie and we have smart guys on the flanks [Cole Perfetti and Connor McMichael] and Krebsie in the middle who I can switch with and make plays with."

Canada went 0/3 on the man advantage in the pre-tournament game against the Russians, but did strike twice in that shellacking of the Germans on Saturday.

"It's tough to assess it, to be honest," said Tourigny. "We had the game against the Germans, I don't know what to think about that one and against the Slovaks, the first power play was no good. The second power play was really good. We didn't connect but we moved the puck well and had good chances. After the first power play, we saw a certain level of frustration. After the second power play, we felt better about ourselves. That's the sample we have so far so it's tough to have a good read on it. We want a little more consistency. We don't want the same start we had last game. It's too early to know exactly what we got."

Team Canada's power play remains 'a work in progress'

Team Canada only has two power play goals so far in the tournament, Bowen Byram believes it's a work in progress still and says they're still getting comfortable with one another with the man advantage.

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Team Canada is honouring the victims of the 2018 Humboldt Broncos bus crash by placing a quilt featuring the team's logo and colours in the stands behind their bench in Edmonton.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I played with a lot of guys on that team so it means a lot that they're still being thought of and we're supporting them," said Schneider, who is one of three Saskatchewan-born players on Team Canada. "The hockey community is so awesome that way. We're so tight-knit and it puts a smile on my face and gives me shivers seeing that."

Quilts symbolize comfort, strength, resilience and coming together.

Our hearts will forever be #HumboldtStrong. Woven into the fabric of Canadian hockey. ❤️👉#WorldJuniors pic.twitter.com/vG8yn3FgbD

— #WorldJuniors (@HC\_WJC) December 27, 2020

During an interview with TSN during the pandemic pause, Team Canada forward Connor Zary, who is from Saskatoon, said the Humboldt victims are always in his mind when he takes the ice.

"I knew a few of those guys on the bus," said Zary, a centre with the Kamloops Blazers. "I played with a couple of them. I played against a couple of them. It's difficult to see how in a blink of an eye everything is taken ... You keep those guys in the back of your mind every time you play or get that opportunity they didn't have to continue."

There's a Humboldt Broncos blanket behind Team Canada's bench. MORE @ <https://t.co/RQxgqsnVTs> pic.twitter.com/4MOVf2RQQZ

— BarDown (@BarDown) December 27, 2020

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Lines at Monday's Team Canada practice:

Holloway - McMichael - Cozens

Perfetti - Newhook - Krebs

Quinn - Byfield - Pelletier

Mercer - Suzuki - Tomasino

Zary

Byram - Drysdale

Harley - Schneider

Guhle - Barron

Korczak (R) - Spence

Levi starts

Garand

Gauthier

Injured: Dach (wrist)

TSN.CA LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181222 Websites

USA TODAY / NHL television schedule: Season will start with NBCSN tripleheader

USA TODAY Sports

The NHL will get back in action next month with a televised tripleheader.

NBCSN will show Pittsburgh-Philadelphia (5:30 ET), Chicago-Tampa Bay (8 ET) and St. Louis-Colorado (10:30 ET) on Jan. 13. The Lightning will raise their Stanley Cup banner before the second game.

Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby and Washington's Alex Ovechkin will be featured seven times, including two head-to-head meetings, in the preliminary television schedule. Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and the New York Rangers, featuring No. 1 overall pick Alexis Lafreniere, will also be on seven times.

The Lightning will be on four times, though none of their eight meetings with the fellow finalist Dallas Stars are on the initial list. The Stars have one game on national TV.

Just two games from the all-Canada North Division are scheduled to be shown, both involving the Toronto Maple Leafs.

NBCSN will show games on Wednesday and Sunday nights. NBC will be on Sunday, plus the final day of the season (May 8). That game's matchup will depend on the playoff picture.

USA TODAY LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181223 Websites

USA TODAY / Sports power couple Lindsey Vonn and P.K. Subban announce they're ending relationship

Mike Brehm

Lindsey Vonn and P.K. Subban, one of sports' top power couples, announced Tuesday that they are ending their relationship.

"Lindsey is one of the most kind and caring people I know," Subban, the New Jersey Devils defenseman, said on his Instagram account about Vonn, the retired champion Olympic skier. "I will always treasure our time as a couple together and the many laughs we shared."

"After much consideration, we have decided to move forward separately. We will always remain friends and love each other immensely. We ask that you respect our privacy during this time."

On her account, Vonn said, "Over the past 3 years PK and I have had some incredible times together. He is a kind, good man, and someone I respect a great deal."

The couple had announced their engagement in August 2019.

Vonn later proposed to Subban on Christmas Day 2019 and gave him a ring, saying on Instagram, "Women aren't the only ones who should get engagement rings!"

The couple often chronicled their life together on social media. They posted a Fourth of July message wearing matching USA bathing suits and topped that on July 4, 2019, with a video of Subban wearing a bikini.

USA TODAY LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181224 Websites

USA TODAY / Blackhawks' Jonathan Toews out indefinitely with 'drained and lethargic' symptoms

Chris Bumbaca

Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews revealed Tuesday symptoms he began experiencing this offseason that left him "drained



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and lethargic" will cause him to miss the start of training camp and keep him out indefinitely.

Toews said he is "working with doctors so I can better understand my condition." The Blackhawks report to camp on Jan. 3, and the 2021 NHL season will begin 10 days later.

"Until I can get my health back to a place where I feel I can perform at an elite level and help my team, I will not be joining the Blackhawks for training camp," Toews said in a statement through the team. "I do not have a timetable for when I will rejoin the team. I am extremely disappointed, but it wouldn't be fair to myself or my teammates to attempt to play in my current condition.

"To Blackhawks fans, I will continue to do whatever I can to get back on the ice and return to play the game I love for the team I love. I will not be making any further comment at this time and ask everyone to please respect my privacy as I focus on my health and recovery."

Toews is the latest NHL star who announced he will miss time due to health issues. Washington Capitals goaltender Henrik Lundqvist will miss the entire season and, on Monday, he said he will undergo open heart surgery.

Blackhawks forward Kirby Dach – the third overall pick in the 2019 draft – could miss the upcoming season after he had wrist surgery on Monday and is expected to miss four to five months. Alex Nylander, another young forward, had surgery last week to repair a meniscus tear in his left knee; he also might be sidelined for the entire 2021 season.

USA TODAY LOADED: 12.30.2020

1181225 Websites

USA TODAY / DK Metcalf, Fernando Tatis Jr., Tyler Herro and Sarah Fuller top list of breakout sports stars in 2020

Chris Bumbaca

It would have been easy for someone, even an athlete, to point to the tragedies of 2020 and decide "My time can wait 'til next year."

That's not how the athletes on this list are wired.

They not only confronted the challenges in front of them, pandemic and all, but rose to new heights. Entering this year, there is a chance you had seen plenty of these athletes, and that he or she had already achieved some level of greatness – at a minimum, the name sounded familiar.

Becoming a breakout star, though, means the name won't be forgotten. These athletes have officially arrived.

20 FOR 2020: Sports figures who defined courageous and kind, selfish and stubborn

WINNERS, LOSERS FROM 2020: The people, institutions that stood out with calendar upended

Joe Burrow

While the bulk of his undefeated Heisman campaign took place in 2019, the future No. 1 overall pick and the LSU Tigers won the national championship in the first few days of 2020. He impressed during his first season with his home-state Cincinnati Bengals, demonstrating why he was worthy of the top selection despite a lackluster roster, particularly on the offensive line. A brutal knee injury ended his year early, but he's already walking again, and will hopefully return near the top of his game in 2021.

Fernando Tatis Jr.

Whether he was bat-flipping, taking 3-0 pitches the other way for grand slams, or flashing the leather for another web-gem, Tatis Jr. provided must-watch baseball in 2020. He helped the San Diego Padres reach the playoffs for the first time in 14 years despite an MVP candidacy that faded over the course of MLB's 60-game season.

Luka Doncic

The overtime game-winner as time expired against the Los Angeles Clippers in the playoffs is one of the iconic highlights of 2020. It was another example of how the Dallas Mavericks' Doncic looks poised to dominate for years to come. His ability to score, distribute and rebound (he averaged 28.8 points, 9.4 rebounds and 8.8 assists per game last season) allows him to stuff the stat sheet. Could MVP hardware be in the 21-year-old's near future?

Cale Makar

The 2020 NHL rookie of the year, Makar posted 50 points across 57 regular-season games before racking up 15 points in 15 playoff games for the Colorado Avalanche, all while establishing himself as one of the top offensive-minded defensemen in the league at age 22.

Josh Allen

Allen led his team to the playoffs a year ago, but the gunslinger took a leap forward in 2020. The Buffalo Bills are AFC East champions for the first time since 1995, and Allen would receive MVP consideration if not for other-worldly play from Aaron Rodgers.

Crystal Dangerfield

Drafted in the second round of the 2020 WNBA draft, Dangerfield was expected to come off the bench for the Minnesota Lynx. Injuries and depth issues pushed her into the starting point guard role, and she never looked back. The Connecticut Huskies product led the Lynx at 16.2 points per game and took home rookie of the year honors.

Tyler Herro & Duncan Robinson

Jimmy Butler provides ample leadership and star power, but without the emergence of Robinson and Herro in the bubble, the Miami Heat likely don't advance to the NBA Finals. Herro set rookie records for most 3-pointers in the NBA Finals (11) and during the entire postseason (48). The 20-year-old's 37-point outburst against the Boston Celtics in Game 4 also made him the youngest to score 30 or more in the conference finals. Meanwhile, Robinson, 26, established himself as one of the game's premiere deep threats — making 44.6% of his 8.3 attempts per game from behind the arc.

Collin Morikawa

In July, Morikawa defeated Justin Thomas at the Workday Charity Open in a playoff. Nearly a month later, the 23-year-old won his first major by two strokes at the PGA Championship.

DeVonta Smith

For a player who caught the game-winning pass in a national title game, the Alabama Crimson Tide wide receiver has somehow surpassed that height this season. The Heisman finalist could become the first non-quarterback or running back to win the award since 1997. He caught 98 passes for 1,511 yards and 17 touchdowns.

Bryson DeChambeau

Is he a savant? Or a maniac? Maybe a little bit of both. He passionately defended his decision to bulk up and add 20 pounds of muscle. DeChambeau backed it up by winning. And it paid off: He won his first major at the 2020 U.S. Open and doesn't appear poised to relinquish his newfound pulpit any time soon.

Gio Reyna

Reyna debuted for Borussia Dortmund in Bundesliga play in January as a 17-year-old. The son of former soccer players Claudia Reyna and



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Danielle Egan, the U.S. international player recorded an assist on a game-winning goal in the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 in February. He was named U.S. Soccer's Young Male Player of the Year.

Sofia Kenin

At 21 years old, Kenin became the youngest American since Serena Williams to win a major Grand Slam singles title (2002) when she won the Australian Open last January. Now 22, Kenin also finished as the French Open runner-up and reached No. 4 in the world rankings.

DK Metcalf

His chase down of Arizona Cardinals defensive back Budda Baker is one of the plays of the year and will forever serve as an example of effort. And 2020 was a season in which Metcalf showed why NFL teams should cringe after letting him slide to the 64th pick in the 2019 draft; he's now Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson's No. 1 target and has caught 80 passes for 1,282 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Randy Arozarena

Taking into consideration the expanded playoff format leading to more opportunities, Arozarena nonetheless made history this October with 10 postseason home runs. Traded by the St. Louis Cardinals during the offseason, Arozarena batted .377 with a 1.273 OPS and 14 RBI during the playoffs. The Tampa Bay Rays won the American League for the first time since 2008, in no small part thanks to Arozarena.

Sarah Fuller

She wasn't the first woman to play in a Division I college football game, and she won't be the last, but to do it in the Southeastern Conference and be the first woman to play and score in a Power Five game will keep her name in the record books forever. The soccer goalkeeper made a pair of extra-points and handled some kickoff duties when the Vanderbilt Commodores' special teams unit became depleted. Of course, she did all of this only after helping the Commodores' women's soccer team win the SEC Tournament.

Jamal Murray & Nikola Jokic

A pair of 3-1 comebacks from the playoff bubble gave the Denver Nuggets the recognition they deserved as the West's third seed. Jamal Murray (23) and Nikola Jokic (25) emerged as elite players capable of beating the game's best on the biggest stages.

Bubbles

Without them, sports in 2020 would not have been as enjoyable -- and potentially impossible. The NBA started the trend by setting up shop in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, at Disney's Wide World of Sports. The NWSL and PLL bubbled in Utah, while the WNBA played its entire season in a bubble, too. For the playoffs, MLB went the bubble route, which appeared to work until Justin Turner tested positive during Game 6 of the World Series. The NHL set up two hubs -- in Edmonton, Alberta, and Toronto -- for the playoffs.

Athlete activism

The expectation was never to simply "shut up and dribble." But after the events of 2020 and a revitalized emphasis on justice -- racial, social, economic, criminal -- players have utilized their platforms to make a statement on issues outside of his or her game.

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