



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 3, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

5 burning questions facing the Carolina Hurricanes as they open training camp today

By Chip Alexander

A year ago, the Carolina Hurricanes played their 41st game and reached the midpoint of the 2019-2020 schedule -- or so they believed -- on Jan. 3 against the Washington Capitals, before a sellout crowd at PNC Arena.

This year, the Canes' preseason training camp didn't open until Jan. 3. There will be no games against the Caps in the 2020-21 regular season, which will be played in its entirety in 2021. At least to start, there will be no fans at PNC Arena.

These are not normal times, nor will this be a normal NHL season during the pandemic. The Canes are scheduled to open camp Sunday for what will be a 56-game regular season, all played in the newly formed Central Division.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour must prepare his team for the season in nine practice days. Then it's off to the starting blocks for four straight road games to open the season. Unless COVID-19 issues arise, the Canes' season opener will be Jan. 14 in Detroit against the Red Wings and the first home game will be Jan. 21 against the Florida Panthers.

Here are five pressing questions as camp begins:

CAN THE CANES STAY VIRUS FREE?

While coronavirus testing will be vigorous and constant, the players, coaches and staff must stay healthy throughout camp. There is no protective bubble. The players will be on their own after the camp sessions and must be mindful of everything they do away from the rink.

"There's going to be some sacrifices," team captain Jordan Staal said on a recent media call. "These are small sacrifices for us to be able to play a game and hopefully entertain a group of people who are longing to watch some hockey."

WHERE DOES JESPER FAST BEST FIT?

Jesper Fast is the newbie in the Canes' group, having signed as a free agent. But where will the veteran forward be used?

One guess could be at right wing on a line centered by Staal with Warren Foegele on the left side, replacing the retired Justin Williams. With the New York Rangers last season, Fast was often on a line with Ryan Strome and Artemi Panarin, so he is capable of being used anywhere among the top-nine forwards.

WHO PLAYS GOALIE FOR THE HURRICANES?

Different camp, same question: Who's the No. 1 goalie? And this year, who's No. 3?

The Canes, under the NHL roster rules for this season, will be required to carry three goalies and they should be Petr Mrazek, James Reimer and likely Alex Nedeljkovic, who has a one-way contract for this year. Antoine Bibeau also is in camp.

Reimer was sharp in July when the NHL's "Return to Play" format began with training camps before conducting the 2020 postseason, having spent the "pause" working on his technique and conditioning. But Mrazek should be the No. 1 guy unless beaten out in this camp.

Having two established goalies will help the Canes in a season when there are 10 sets of back-to-back games. The goaltending strain will be felt by many NHL teams.

WHO'S THE FOURTH CENTER?

This could be Brind'Amour's most interesting lineup decision. He's set with centers Sebastian Aho, Staal and Vincent Trocheck. But on the fourth line?

Morgan Geekie made a tremendous rookie impression last season before the NHL's coronavirus pause, with three goals and an assist in his first two regular-season games. His postseason numbers: Eight games, one assist.

Jordan Martinook has been used as the fourth-line center and could again. Drew Shore, signed to a two-way deal in October, has 94 games of NHL experience.

HOW WILL THE CAROLINA HURRICANES' LINES, D PAIRS LOOK?

Just a guesstimate but Brind'Amour will have Aho centering Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teravainen. Why shouldn't he? It could be among the most dynamic in the division and the league.

If Fast plays with Staal and Foegele, Trocheck could center Ryan Dzingel and Martin Necas. That would have Geekie possibly with Brock McGinn and Martinook. Or Martinook centering McGinn and Nino Niederreiter. There are plenty of forward options and someone will have to sit.

On D, it's set with Jacob Slavin and Dougie Hamilton, Brady Skjei and a healthy Brett Pesce, and Haydn Fleury and Jake Gardiner — both lefty shooters — as the third pair.



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Waddell Sets Stage for Training Camp

Canes President & GM talks camp competition, taxi squad, fans at PNC Arena and more

by Michael Smith

As both the President and General Manager of the Carolina Hurricanes, Don Waddell is in a constant state of motion, as the duality of his role forces him to straddle both the hockey and business sides of the organization.

It's been two weeks since the National Hockey League and its Players' Association announced an agreement for a 56-game regular season, and even with a couple of holidays in the time since, you can imagine how frantic Waddell's juggling act has become.

If he's not on the phone with one of the other 30 general managers in the league or chatting with his hockey staff, he's probably on a Microsoft Teams meeting or a conference call with vice presidents on the business side.

Waddell and the Canes are dissecting the roster options for this season, preparing for an expansion draft that will take place in seven months and navigating a pair of high-profile contract extensions with the challenge of a flat salary cap. There's a 54-page COVID-19 protocol form the league, in addition to another 13-page document on travel for the upcoming season. The early holiday news also kicked the business side of the organization into high gear, as various departments prepare for and adapt to the challenges ahead.

In between one phone call and a quick chat in another office down the hall on the fourth floor of PNC Arena, I briefly caught up with Waddell to set the stage for training camp.

Training Camp

With a smaller group of 38 players in town, just eight days of two-group skates and no exhibition games, training camp is going to look and feel a little different this year. Maybe most notable is that, with minimal offseason movement in either direction, the Canes' roster is basically set.

"I don't want to ever shut the door on any new players because you just don't know what's going to happen," Waddell said. "We may move some guys around during camp to get a look at them and make a decision on who stays and who goes."

With so little lead time before the regular season begins, the Canes figure to have a slight advantage given they're returning essentially the same team that was in the bubble four months ago.

"You really only have eight days to prepare, and that's why Roddy wants to basically have the team we had last year," Waddell said. "It's a benefit that these guys all know the system and how Roddy wants to play."

Taxi Squad

Though the active roster limit remains 23 players for the upcoming season, each team will carry a "taxi squad" to help combat an emergency situation in which COVID-19 forces a number of players out of the lineup. This group will be comprised of four to six players, one of which will have to be a third goaltender if a team does not carry three goalies on its active roster (sorry, EBUGs). The taxi squad will practice with the NHL team at home and could travel with the team, as needed.

"From there, you have a lot of freedom between what type of players you carry," Waddell said. "With us, our plan will probably be to carry two forwards, two defensemen and a goalie if we decide to put one there. We'll see how camp goes and make sure we don't have any injuries or things like that, and then we'll make a decision of who else we'll put on there."

Could someone like Seth Jarvis, Jamieson Rees or Ryan Suzuki (when the World Juniors are over) join the taxi squad? Yes, and from a developmental standpoint, that could be beneficial. Then again, the taxi squad needs to be NHL-ready just in case they're needed - it's essentially a recall from the American Hockey League without the need to arrange last-minute travel and then proceed through quarantine protocols.

"We have to make sure when we go on this first road trip of four games that you have bodies that can jump right into the lineup," Waddell said. "You have to make sure you have enough depth on your taxi squad to support what you need at the NHL level."

2020-21 Schedule

The Canes' 2020-21 schedule is a quirky 56-game slate, fitting for what figures to be a quirky season. As the league aims to limit travel as much as possible, which should help curb potential spread of COVID-19, the Canes will play 26 two-game series (and four one-off games) against their seven Central Division opponents.

It's a format that Waddell would like to see explored more in the future.

"We think it's better for our athletes and even creates more rivalries within teams," he said.

Fans in the Building

The Canes and PNC Arena are among the vast majority of the NHL that will begin the 2020-21 season with no fans in attendance.

"We will continue to work closely with health officials to navigate the safest return to hosting fans and hope to have fans at our home games later this season," the team said in a statement on Dec. 21.



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"We all see what's going on in our country, and it doesn't make any sense right now for us to push that pedal," Waddell said. "I think it's critical that we're prepared. If we do get a chance to expand how many fans come in here, we want to show everybody that we can do it in a safe environment."

Waiver Activity

Defenseman Roland McKeown and forward Clark Bishop, who both re-signed one-year, two-way contracts this

offseason, cleared waivers last week. Neither player will take part in training camp, and since both require waivers to be assigned elsewhere, the Canes filed those transactions.

McKeown has been loaned to Skelleftea AIK of the Swedish Hockey League, and Waddell said the plan is for the 24-year-old defenseman to play this season overseas before returning to North America in late March or early April.



Carolina Hurricanes top 25 under 25 #6: Seth Jarvis

Carolina's most recent first-round pick has one of the highest ceilings in the organization.

By kleblanchockey

In recent drafts, the Hurricanes organization has targeted forwards who have the ability to play the fast, creative brand of hockey that coach Rod Brind'Amour demands. Carolina found a terrific organizational fit when it was able to select Seth Jarvis 13th overall in this year's NHL Entry Draft. Earlier this week, Jarvis signed his entry-level contract with Carolina, committing his future to the club.

Last season was a breakout season in the WHL for Jarvis, who almost hit the century mark in points in just 58 games. The Manitoba native finished second in the WHL in scoring in 2019-20 and was first in the league with 1.69 points-per-game. The WHL was set to start its season on Jan. 8, but has delayed that decision and will discuss a return to play scenario when the league board of governors meet later this month.

Jarvis is a dynamic offensive player, driven by his skating ability, creativity and motor. The young forwards ability to force pressure and regain puck possession allows for turnover creation and increased scoring opportunities when on the ice. He is terrific through the neutral zone, both offensively and defensively, constantly pressuring with and without the puck. Jarvis can finish at an elite level, picking corners on the rush or below the circles, but also is able to make the key pass to a teammate to finish off a play. He is best in close, where he finds high danger areas of the ice to put the puck in the back of the net.

Among Carolina's prospect group, Jarvis is one of the players with the highest ceilings from both a game impact and point production standpoint. He is, at his highest projection, a top-line, top power-play option for the Hurricanes for the future, and at his floor, he should be an NHL regular for years to come. Carolina fans should be happy it will come in a Hurricanes jersey.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article248133520.html>
<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/don-waddell-sets-stage-for-can-es-training-camp/c-319940992>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2021/1/2/22210678/carolina-hurricanes-top-25-under-25-6-seth-jarvis>



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SportScan

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

1197698 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina Hurricanes 2020-21 season preview

By Dom Luszczyszyn

Jan 2, 2021

Two years ago around this time, many were still arguing about the Hurricanes and whether the team could ever live up to their expectations. From that point on, there weren't many doubts as the team went on a streak hotter than a summer heatwave. In the second half of 2018-19 they were truly one of the best teams in hockey and parlayed that to a conference finals berth. It was there that they learned what it really took to be a true contender, losing all four games to Boston.

That part is still a work in progress as the following season saw the team once again finish just under a 100-point pace and once again lose to the Boston Bruins — this time in the first round, with one more win than the year prior.

The big question going into this season is whether the Hurricanes can take the next step and establish themselves as a bonafide contender. The Hurricanes are a good team, but can they be a great team? I think the answer is yes, and this is the year they prove it.

The Projection

Generally speaking, a contender is a team that is a true-talent 100-point team or better. There are a number of teams who reach that level every season, but it takes a bit more for that to be considered the expectation for a team, rather than a good season. Before this season there are eight teams projected to finish with 68 points or more on average, a 100-point pace, and Carolina is one of them. With a projection of 69.3 points, the Hurricanes play at a 100-point pace in about 61 percent of simulations.

The chart above shows a lot of blue and not a lot of red, the true makings of a great team. It's not completely pristine with some simulations ending poorly, but the Hurricanes find themselves in a very good spot here. The playoffs are extremely likely at 82 percent.

This team is looking for more though of course and while their chances of winning a round are under 50 percent, that's true of every team but five. It's a product of playoff uncertainty more than anything and the Hurricanes look to be slight favorites in the opening round. In terms of going the distance, Carolina's chances are just over five percent which is another barometer for being a contender. It's the same chance the team has at being the league's top team during the regular season too.

Even the top seed in the division isn't out of the question and that possibility became even likelier with Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov being out for the season. The fact the Lightning still have full control over the division without their best player is probably frustrating to others, but if there's any team in this division that can knock them down a peg, it's Carolina.

The Hurricanes may not possess the same insane level of depth as Tampa Bay, but their lineup from top to bottom looks strong in its own

right. More importantly though is they have young, elite pieces that can potentially hang with the Central Division's top team — now that one of them is out anyways.

The Roster

For clarity, each player's projected win value shown is over a full 82-game pace to better visualize each player's expected true talent level. The team's simulated record accounts for injuries and expected time missed using a games played projection.

By GSVA, Carolina has four skaters projected to perform at an elite level next season: Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teravainen up front, and Dougie Hamilton on the back-end. Only two other teams, Boston and Colorado, can say the same thing with Tampa Bay missing the mark only because of Kucherov's injury. It's absolutely incredible company to be in and speaks volumes about the high-end core Carolina has assembled.

Of all those players it's Hamilton who rates the highest and it's no secret this model adores him. Only Victor Hedman is projected to have a higher GSVA next season among defensemen, a very lofty bar that is sure to raise some eyebrows among skeptics of his game. It was those same skeptics that suggested he couldn't be a true No. 1 defenseman, citing all the previous coaches who wouldn't use him in that role. He proved them wrong last season when he did just that with what was looking like a Norris-calibre season. His high GSVA rating suggests that season was no fluke.

That's because what he did last season wasn't all that different from years prior, he just played more and had the percentages line up much better than usual. In each of the three seasons before last, teams scored 56, 57, and 58 percent expected goal rates with Hamilton on the ice — all in tough minutes. Last season he was at 58 percent again. No defenseman has consistently driven a team's chance share more than Hamilton over the past four seasons, not in the minutes he plays. Last year was the first year the results lined up in a meaningful way where Carolina had 64 percent of the goals with Hamilton on the ice.

Most important for Hamilton's perception were those results manifesting on the defensive side of the puck. Most would at least admit he's an offensive force where he's heavily involved in the attack and an incredible goal scorer, but would then be quick to dismiss it for some defensive shortcoming. That may have been the case in the past — and he more than made it up for it by being one of the league's best drivers of offense — but it wasn't the case last season. No Carolina defender was on for fewer expected or actual goals against per 60 than Hamilton. Shaky defense was always the knock on Hamilton, deserved or not, but those qualms were silenced last year. It was enough to get Hamilton a regular role on the penalty kill, one where the team allowed the fewest chances of any defender (but also the most goals, to be fair).

The most important role he earned though was one he's been inexplicably denied for the majority of his career: a job on the top power-play unit. I'm still not sure how he was passed over for the likes of Justin Faulk and TJ Brodie in years past, but that mistake was finally corrected and the Hurricanes feasted as a result. With Hamilton on the ice they generated nearly 10 expected goals per 60, and almost scored as many. The latter was the third most for a defender while the former led every defenseman by one full goal. It led to the team having the fourth-best goals-per-60 on the power play. There are some who might suggest



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that's on the forwards, but those people would be forgetting that Hamilton actually started the season on the second unit, a unit so good it eventually became the top unit.

With that being said, Hamilton having the second-highest GSVA doesn't necessarily mean he's the league's second-best defenseman. It means he's the second most valuable based on this particular measurement, one which heavily leans on what happens when a player is on the ice. When that player is Hamilton, it's a lot of good things for a long stretch of time. He gets copious amount of credit, even if he may not be fully deserving of it all.

That's an important caveat for Hamilton whose usage is only slightly above average. That's not because he doesn't play tough minutes against the opposing team's best, but because he gets a lot of help from his teammates. At five-on-five he often gets to play with the team's best forwards and exclusively with the team's other best defenseman, Jaccob Slavin. He doesn't quite make the elite tier, but he's extremely close at 1.9 wins. The duo form the second-best pair in hockey, just behind Nashville's top duo of Roman Josi and Ryan Ellis.

Slavin is the type of defenseman that can do everything well, one that can fit into any role. He contributes a lot on offense, he plays all situations, he moves the puck well, and he's a calming presence on defense. That's a rare breed and is what has some believing he's the driving force on Carolina's back-end, allowing Hamilton to do what he does best. I can see the argument for it with Slavin having the steadier reputation, but based on regressed outputs, players have generally performed better with Hamilton at both ends of the ice in each of the last two seasons. That doesn't mean the observers are necessarily wrong, it could also mean there's something that's not currently being captured, or simply a difference in philosophy over what's valuable.

As for that top forward line, it has the potential to be something really special for Carolina, the team's own version of the Perfection Line. Putting a team's three best forwards together can sometimes be a risky gambit that will see the team's depth suffer, but there are times when it's too hard to resist. Carolina has one of those situations where the trio has teased some tantalizingly strong results together. In 286 minutes last year, the trio had a 57 percent expected goals rate together and were even more dangerous at finishing which led to 4.6 goals-per-60 and a 65 percent goal rate. That carried over to the playoffs where the line was absolutely dominant with an even better 62.5 percent expected goals rate while outscoring opponents 5-0. There should be little doubt about this being a top-five line in hockey.

So who's driving the bus here? All three have their merits which is what makes the line so effective, but it likely comes down to either Aho or Svechnikov. Both players come out looking exceptional in transition last season as the primary puck carriers, while Teravainen looked more like a passenger. He had a below-average controlled entry rate, preferring to dump-and-chase, which feels like an odd choice for a skilled winger. In zone, they all shoot and pass the puck equal amounts, but it's Teravainen getting all the assist credit, gaining a reputation as the playmaker of the line as a result. I'm not so sure that's right as he mostly just gets the benefit of passing the puck to two scorers — Aho and Svechnikov don't get that same benefit. Svechnikov actually had more high danger passes per 60 than Teravainen last season, and in 2018-19 Aho was miles ahead in that category. With that in mind, it feels likely that both Aho's and Svechnikov's high individual expected goals rate isn't something explicitly driven by Teravainen's playmaking ability. They can create chances on their own too, something Teravainen isn't as adept at. To his credit though, he does have the best defensive results of the three by a considerable degree and that brings his value closer in line.

When it's all said and done though, it'll likely be Svechnikov who blossoms as the go-to guy. That shouldn't be a huge surprise given he was a No. 2 pick, but the results of his first two seasons are already quite promising. Mainly, it's his ability to drive scoring chances with Carolina earning 3.52 expected goals per 60 over the last two seasons with Svechnikov on the ice. That's 0.14 more than the next closest player, Mark Stone. With just an average conversion rate, that kind of output

would be top 10 by actual goals, sandwiched between David Pastrnak and John Tavares. By expected goals, no player since 2007-08 has been on the ice for more offense over a two-year span than Svechnikov. He's elite and only getting better. He also scored two goals by lifting the puck with his stick, lacrosse style, and to be honest the ability to pull that off should be worth another extra win.

It's an incredible starting five only bested by, again, Boston and Colorado. The rest of the group looks kind of unimpressive for a contender though. That's always the worry with putting all your eggs in one basket, but the overwhelming advantage driven from that top five should more than make up for the underwhelming depth. The bottom three lines and two pairs rank 22nd in the league and come with a lot of question marks. If those answers end up on the positive end of things, the Hurricanes will be in a very good position come playoff time.

The biggest question of all is whether Vincent Trocheck can return to being a legitimate, high-end second-line center. He certainly used to be at that level, grading out above two wins of value, but has fallen quickly over the last two seasons. To his credit, Trocheck did score 1.87 points-per-60 last season at five-on-five, but the on-ice results have been very troubling over the last few seasons. He's been out-chanced and out-scored in each of the last three seasons with a lot of issues on the defensive side of the puck where a bad defensive team consistently allows more chances and goals with Trocheck on the ice.

When that happens in three straight seasons, it's natural to question the player's utility, but with Trocheck there's a chance the issues are outside of his control. His decline coincides with Florida's infamous expansion draft debacle, one that saw Trocheck lose consistent linemate Reilly Smith. Since then, Trocheck has been a man on his own island with a revolving door of linemates on either side.

There hasn't been any consistency and it's likely difficult to find a groove under those conditions. To his credit, he's still been excellent at carrying the puck out of the defensive zone and into the offensive zone, and is a strong presence in the offensive zone. Without much help though, all that is lost, and it's clear the Hurricanes felt his value could be salvaged. Maybe he really is a trainwreck in his own zone, but it seems he does enough otherwise to be useful. A bounce-back feels likely here and I like that he pushes Jordan Staal to the third line. That's probably a better fit for him considering his defensive utility as a play-driver, but complete inability to drive actual goals on offense.

Where I'm much more concerned is on the second pair with the team's other big acquisition last season, Brady Skjei. He grades out below replacement level which is especially bad news because he's signed for four more years at \$5.3 million. Earlier in the offseason I had his deal listed as one of the league's worst contracts and somehow the Rangers turned him into a first-round pick. Skjei used to be a lot more useful, but his defensive performance has only gotten worse since his rookie season and his expected goals rate has dropped every year. It's difficult to ignore that he gets scored on more often than his expected rate nearly every season with last year being his worst. There might be a real reason for that beyond bad luck and it stems from his breakouts.

Last year with New York, Skjei averaged nine controlled exits per 60, but also 7.5 failed exits per 60. He's league average at getting the puck out, but near the bottom of the league in terms of risk factor. He has a tendency of turning it over and that leads to more time being spent defending, something he's also not very strong at.

That doesn't bode well for his partner Brett Pesce who went through similar problems with Joel Edmundson last season. He didn't break the puck out as much, but he was just as much of a risk with an even worse success to failure ratio. Playing with Edmundson tanked Pesce's numbers down to a 51 percent expected goals rate, a major step down from the year prior where he was at 57 percent. Most of it was on the defensive side of the puck and though he himself saw some slight drops in his transition stats, it's more likely to be the fault of his partner given his previous reputation for sterling defense. On the zone exit side, Pesce had to take on a bigger workload than the season prior and given that



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consideration he did well. Carolina still needs Pesce to bounce back to his former value (which wasn't far off from Slavin's), but that'll be difficult to do while dragging another anchor around.

Really, it should be Jake Gardiner next to Pesce and it wouldn't surprise me to see him bounce back after his own nightmare season. In his last three seasons with Toronto, Gardiner had very high goal percentages every year from 59 percent in 2016-17 to 56 percent the year after to a career-high of 62 percent in his final season. In each year that was driven by a strong expected goals rate, playing with the team's talented group of forwards, and getting good goaltending behind him. Last year his goals percentage imploded to 40 percent and I have a hard time believing that was on him when his expected rate remained decent at 52 percent. To go from three straight seasons of .930 goaltending behind you to a .901 is bad luck, plain and simple. Getting six percent shooting the other way probably isn't on him either.

Gardiner is known for making some costly turnovers, yes, but his successful and failed exit rate was completely average last season and not that different from a year prior. He definitely wasn't as good defensively as he was before (he was coming off a major injury), but it wasn't nearly to the degree his on-ice results suggested. If Gardiner gets back to playing the way he used to, the Hurricanes could have the makings of a very strong pair with Pesce and the duo seem like they would complement each other well. Skjei is what people think Gardiner is, and I can't see why his very risky style would be more deserving to be trusted on the second pair.

Aside from last year's deadline additions, there are still a lot of questions to be answered from the returning players.

Nino Niederreiter is a big one as he had a major drop-off last season. His expected goals rate looks fine, but he struggled to generate his own chances and was a complete passenger in transition. His defensive impact is still there though, so he should see a mutually beneficial partnership with Trocheck. Martin Necas is currently slotted on the fourth line, but it wouldn't at all be a surprise to see him get some time in the top six with that line. The speedy winger was very highly touted going into last season and has a lot of offensive flair — he scored 1.9 points-per-60 at five-on-five — but his defensive game still needs some work. He already looks like an elite zone entry machine though and his further progression would really help Carolina's depth look much more formidable.

And then of course there's the goaltending which ... actually doesn't look that bad. The Hurricanes get a lot of flak for their tandem of Petr Mrazek and James Reimer, but they performed admirably under tough circumstances. Carolina plays a fast-paced game and that can leave the goaltending hanging at times. While most see the 17th-ranked .903 team save percentage, what they're missing is the tandem allowed 0.15 fewer goals against per 60 than expected last year. Believe it or not, that was the sixth-best mark in the league last season. Mrazek ranked 22nd in goals saved with three while Reimer was actually fifth at 7.5, a nice bounce-back after an awful season a year prior. That's Mrazek's second straight season being above average, which leads to his high grade.

If the team can tighten up a little defensively, the goaltending will look a lot stronger — but they do appear to be doing their job based on public metrics. The tandem ranks seventh in the league, putting Carolina in the top 10 at every position. There are only two other teams that can say the same: Colorado and Vegas (the goalie model likes Andrei Vasilevskiy a lot more after recent tune-ups, but still not enough to place Tampa Bay's goaltending in the top 10). Again, Carolina is in impressive company.

I'm not sure if this is the Hurricanes' year just yet — but you can start seeing a world where it very well can be. They have the makings of a super line and a super pair. Their goaltending is decent. And though there are questions with the depth, there's a lot of potential for positive answers that would further elevate Carolina's stock.

Hurricanes stock used to never live up to the lofty expectations placed on it every year. After two straight seasons of delivering, it's time to believe

in this group. They're the real deal and this feels like the year they arrive as bonafide contenders.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.03.2021

1197772 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Travis Hamonic likely to join Canucks on professional tryout

January 3, 2021, 1:33 AM

Staff Writer

Free agent defenceman Travis Hamonic may be joining the Vancouver Canucks on a professional tryout contract, Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reports.

Hamonic is currently a free agent after three seasons with the Calgary Flames. During the 2019-20 season, the 30-year-old had three goals and 12 points in 50 games.

The Canucks have previously shown interest in the defenceman, with Friedman reporting that the team was very interested in the blueliner before they acquired Nate Schmidt.

Canucks general manager Jim Benning and coach Travis Green are scheduled to speak on Sunday.

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Sportsnet.ca / 3 bold Winnipeg Jets predictions for 2021

Ken Wiebe

January 2, 2021, 11:37 AM

WINNIPEG — Flipping the calendar will be a welcome respite for the Winnipeg Jets.

Simply put, the Jets didn't experience a whole lot of joy in 2020.

Whether it was the departure of long-time defenceman Dustin Byfuglien becoming official with the mutual termination of the final two years of his contract in April or an early exit from the qualifying round series against the Calgary Flames, the Jets endured ample disappointment.

If bowing out in four games to the Flames wasn't frustrating enough, the Jets had Mark Scheifele at their disposal for only three shifts, while Patrik Laine and Mason Appleton also suffered injuries that knocked them out of the post-season.

A new season brings with it a fresh perspective and a sense of optimism for the Jets, who believe they've bolstered their defence corps after dealing with massive turnover in 2019-20, and addressed the second-line centre spot by bringing back Paul Stastny.



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Will the off-season moves translate into success as the Jets move into the All-Canadian Division for this compressed, one-off sprint to the finish?

That remains to be seen, but a new campaign on the horizon also provides a platform for predictions, and here are three bold ones for 2021:

1. Connor Hellebuyck will repeat as the Vezina Trophy winner

Some may view this as me staying on the safe side of the predictions pool, but here's the counter argument to that: Nobody has won the trophy for top goalie in the NHL in consecutive seasons since Martin Brodeur accomplished the feat in 2006-07 and 2007-08.

That was in the midst of a remarkable run that saw Brodeur capture the Vezina four times in five seasons and repeat twice — with Miikka Kiprusoff interrupting the cycle in 2005-06.

The only other goalies to repeat since 1979-80 are Dominik Hasek (1993-94 and 1994-95, and 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99) and Patrick Roy (1988-89 and 1989-90).

Hellebuyck has been nominated for the Vezina twice during the past three seasons, winning it for the first time in 2019-20. There was a good reason Hellebuyck found himself on ballots for the Most Valuable Player award.

In a season where the Jets gave up too many high-danger scoring chances, Hellebuyck displayed a level of excellence that allowed his team to compete almost every night. Since he turned pro, Hellebuyck has not only embraced but flourished in the role of a workhorse.

At a time when many teams are adopting more of a 1A and 1B mentality when it comes to the goalie position, Hellebuyck prefers to start a higher volume of games — and that should serve him well in what is going to be a compressed schedule.

Of course the Jets are going to need some strong play from backup Laurent Brossoit, but Hellebuyck is determined to build off last season and be even better — especially after consecutive early exits from the Stanley Cup playoffs.

That's part of the reason he should enter as the front-runner to capture the Vezina again.

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

2. Patrik Laine will adopt the Jacob Trouba mentality

The speculation surrounding the future of the Finnish forward has created much consternation among the fan base, and that doesn't figure to be going away anytime soon.

If Laine is looking for some historical perspective, he should look no further than former teammate Jacob Trouba.

Trouba is one of the few Jets to take his trade request public, but one thing he did incredibly well in those next three seasons after the contract stalemate was settled was compartmentalize.

He was easily able to separate the business side of the game from the performance side. Instead of dreaming about where he might eventually end up, Trouba worked hard at his craft and pushed to make himself a better player.

By the time the Jets decided a long-term extension was not in the cards (with one season left before Trouba was scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent), the ninth-overall pick in the 2009 NHL Draft had just completed his best year as a pro.

Sure, his point totals benefitted from time on the top power-play unit (thanks in part to an injury to Dustin Byfuglien), but Trouba kept his focus on the ice.

Trouba was ultimately traded to the New York Rangers in the summer of 2019, and instead of going to arbitration, he agreed to the seven-year, \$56-million deal he coveted.

It's been written in this space many times, but the first order of business for the Jets is to find a way to salvage the relationship with Laine.

But if that's not possible, the onus is on Laine to put together another impressive season that will convince potential suitors he's worth the acquisition cost and the lucrative, long-term pact he will likely be looking for in the summer of 2021.

Taking another step in his development is essential, and it wouldn't come as a shock for Laine to inject himself back into the Rocket Richard Trophy discussion this season either.

3. The Jets will qualify for the playoffs

If the pandemic has taught us one thing, it's to predict the unpredictable.

With so many unknowns going into the new season, it's hard to get a handle on which teams are going to handle the unusual circumstances best when play resumes.

The creation of this all-Canadian division, even if it's only for one season, is being welcomed by most with open arms.

It's also being viewed as a nice change of pace for many.

Much like the Jets are probably happy to get away from the meat grinder that is the Central Division, the Toronto Maple Leafs are likely thrilled to know they won't be facing the Boston Bruins or Tampa Bay Lightning in the first round of the playoffs this year.

The Pacific Division hasn't been a walk in the park the past several seasons for the Calgary Flames, Edmonton Oilers or Vancouver Canucks, but each of those clubs believe there is an opportunity ahead to take the next step when it matters most — even if some flaws with their respective rosters remain.

The Montreal Canadiens are being viewed by numerous observers as the winners of the off-season, making a number of significant moves to bolster the roster.

About the only constant when it comes to predictions is that the Ottawa Senators are expected to finish in the basement, even though brighter days are expected not that far down the road.

The crystal ball remains a bit cloudy when it comes to the rest of the division, though.

The truth of the matter is that the Jets could probably finish anywhere from third to sixth and it wouldn't surprise that many people.

But with a Vezina-calibre goalie, a skilled forward group and an unheralded defence corps that could bounce between adequate and average depending on the level of internal growth, it says here that the Jets will find a way to grab one of the four playoff spots available in the all-Canadian division.

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Sportsnet.ca / Recapping 2020's flurry of moves to get you up to speed on NHL hockey

Justin Bourne

January 2, 2021, 10:30 AM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 3, 2021

Hockey, you may recall, is a sport played on ice in which two groups of five skaters attempt to shoot a black frozen disc past goalies and into a net.

That little tidbit there is for fans of the seven teams who started their 2020-21 NHL training camps this past Thursday, nearly nine months since their favourite team had organized to officially play or even practice. Most hockey fans have had a tiny taste between March 2020 and now, but at most they've been awarded with two months of NHL hockey over a nine-month span.

In sum, we're likely all a little rusty when it comes to keeping up with the NHL.

Maybe I don't have to go back and re-explain the rules, but like... some actually are different. So, we'll start there and then I'll try to bring you back to speed on a few other things.

Did you know that when a player is dragging his toe to stay onside, it no longer has to stay in contact with the ice?

It's now a "plane" up from the leading edge of that blue line, meaning if your toe is just held over the blue line, as opposed to touching it, you can be deemed onside. (Other lines work this way, remember, like a puck being shot into the net.)

The goal was to stop the impossible quibbling about whether a guy's skate was a millimetre off the ice or touching it when the puck officially crossed the blue, which yes, was annoying. But I'll admit I'm in the minority here, in that I don't love this tweak. Dragging a toe wasn't hard and the quibbles were few enough.

By sheer geometry it's easier to just push your leg straight back rather than back-and-down in an attempt to stay onside, which to me opens up a whole other can of vague squinting and guessing about the millimetres of a skate's position. I know if I'm trying to get to the net as fast as possible, I'm throwing a leg straight back in the air now, which brings about a different kind of quibble.

All you need to know about NHL's 2020-21 off-side rule change

BUT ANYWAY, my opinion aside, that's a rule now. And rules affect players, like...

Taylor Hall, who plays for the Buffalo Sabres now.

He does! I know, crazy right? He signed a one-year, \$8-million deal to play alongside Jack Eichel, likely in hopes of lighting it up and earning a big deal this upcoming summer. (Make no mistake, the deal is less "play for the Sabres" and more "play with Eichel," in another example of how great players help build teams.)

The Sabres meanwhile are auditioning to keep him in blue and gold, which hey, if things go well enough, why not?

Bobby Ryan agreed to a deal with the Detroit Red Wings

Ryan got sober towards the end of last season, and looked great upon his return. It's impossible not to root for this guy. What he really needed next was an opportunity, which he's gonna get in Detroit. He'll play on the power play, play in the top six, and have the chance to earn another quality deal. It's a chance to prove he's got more in the tank at 33, a deal from which both sides stand to benefit.

Mike Hoffman, who's headed to St. Louis where he's likely to sign a one-year deal for between \$4-5 million.

I wrote about why that spot works so well for him earlier in the week here. While we're talking about the Blues, you know who else plays for them now?

Torey Krug, who signed a seven-year deal to be a mainstay in Missouri.

Pietrangelo's visit to Vegas sealed the deal with Golden Knights

Alex Pietrangelo signed a seven-year deal to play for Las Vegas, for \$8.8 million per season.

Vegas! Pietrangelo! The top of that West Division with Colorado and St. Louis is going to be a blast. I'm guessing when he signed in Vegas the plan wasn't to have to play the Blues eight times this upcoming season, but y'know, look around the world — things got a little weird out there.

Speaking of playing their old team eight times in a single condensed season...

Zdeno Chara signed with the Washington Capitals, which you probably heard given its recency. That one's still hard to believe, particularly given his extremely affordable new deal.

It sounds like Boston wanted him to be OK with a pretty tiny role, which likely included being scratched some nights, and Big Z wasn't ready to be reduced to that. My understanding is they wanted their kids to get more of an opportunity. This seems strange to me — isn't Boston a peak 'win now' team? It's 56 games then playoffs. Maybe this isn't the time to fret about making room for OK young players?

This comes down to where you are on what Chara is at this point, and many Bruins fans think he's done. Personally, I think they'd have benefitted from having his presence in the third pair killing penalties and playing 15 minutes a night at \$1.5 million or whatever, rather than letting him walk to one of the divisional favourites.

In sum, big names changed teams all over the place. Joe Thornton and Wayne Simmonds signed with the Toronto Maple Leafs, as did TJ Brodie. Anthony Duclair signed in Florida.

Tyler Toffoli left the Canucks and signed in Montreal to play for a Canadiens team who also traded Max Domi for Josh Anderson, and got Jake Allen to back up Carey Price.

Will Canadiens' off-season moves be enough in an all-Canadian division?

Jake Allen takes us somewhere useful here actually. Because goalies boy, goalies played some musical chairs this off-season...

First off, Braden Holtby wasn't re-signed by the Washington Capitals, so he left to sign a two-year deal with the Vancouver Canucks. (You're likely familiar with the follow-up here, which is that Henrik Lundqvist actually signed there to back-up young prospect Ilya Samsonov, but has instead had to step aside to get open heart surgery. We wish Hank well in his recovery here.)

So, Holtby to Vancouver. The Canucks, you remember, had a very good goaltender in Jacob Markstrom. Well, funny story, Markstrom signed a six-year deal in Calgary worth six mill a pop.

The Flames used to have Cam Talbot in net, remember him? Yeah he went to Minnesota. There was an opening there because the Wild traded Devan Dubnyk to San Jose, who had goaltending issues of their own (this is some bet on a bounce-back by the Sharks, as Dubnyk was one of three goalies who had a worse save percentage than Martin Jones last season out of the 54 who started at least 24 games).

When Chicago traded Robin Lehner to Vegas last season, they essentially decided to move on from goaltending experience period. While Vegas is left with All The Goalie Experience in Marc-Andre Fleury and Lehner, Chicago is going with none of it, allowing Corey Crawford to walk and sign with the New Jersey Devils for two years at a cap hit of \$3.9 million per season.

Malcolm Subban is the remaining Blackhawks goalie with the most experience, at 66 games. Meanwhile, Cory Schneider retired, if you're wondering why there's an opening in New Jersey.

Holtby has skills and pedigree to rediscover his game in Vancouver

Still with me?

Oh, here's one: did you remember that the California teams last season were third-last, second-last and last in the West at last season's pause? Isn't that insane? The dreaded 'California trip' was finally a vacation for NHL teams. But don't rule out something of a bounce-back there.



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The Sharks have Erik Karlsson, Brent Burns, Marc-Edouard Vlasic, Evander Kane, Logan Couture, Timo Meier, Tomas Hertl — I mean, just boatloads of skill. The word from those in the know is that the Sharks were full of nagging injuries last season which nag no longer. So, do you feel comfortable betting they'll be Conference-worst awful again? I sure don't.

A few more reminders on our way out the door:

Oliver Ekman-Larsson kind of asked for a trade this summer, but only green-lit two teams: Vancouver and Boston. Both teams made plays for the Coyotes captain, but weren't willing to give up everything Arizona was asking. At some point, the conversations passed an arbitrary OEL-set deadline and nothing happened.

As I see it, both Vancouver and Boston have high expectations, and could very well fall short of those based on off-season moves. The Coyotes look... if I may just come out and be honest here, they look awful. They're gonna need all-world goaltending to sniff playoffs. If any or all of these possibilities become realities — these three teams struggling versus internal expectations — could an OEL deal be brought back to life? I don't see why not.

There are some exciting, exciting young players in the NHL this year, courtesy of this past-summer's not-at-all rigged draft that saw the brightest star to come into the league in years head to the New York Rangers (I kid, I kid). Alexis Lafreniere, Quinton Byfield, and Tim Stuetzle headline a class of players sure to not just play, but contribute in their first seasons.

In all, that should get you as up to speed as you need to be start getting back engaged here. All games are divisional this year, and the divisions have been realigned as such:

You love to see it.

What do you think of the realigned divisions for the 2020-21 NHL season? pic.twitter.com/tMbrAB5nZn

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) December 20, 2020

Four teams from each division will make playoffs, then play series of 1 vs. 4 and 2 vs. 3, meaning you have to play your way out of your division and into the league semifinals. (Meaning, yes, there will be a Canadian team remaining come the league semifinals.)

The best part is the divisional winners will then be re-seeded to play 1 vs. 4 and 2 vs. 3 at that point (there are no conferences), meaning the Bruins could play, oh I don't know, say, Toronto, in the Cup Final if things shook out strangely enough.

Oh, and new news: Colorado and Vegas, Boston and Philadelphia are going to play outdoor games in Lake Tahoe in April.

All the rest comes down to how much you stayed in touch with the game while it was away. Regardless, hopefully you feel more informed or at least refreshed than you did a few minutes ago back at the top of this piece.

If you feel I missed anything important, well then by all means please share it in the comments below. Let's get everyone back on the same page as we scream towards what will likely be one of the strangest seasons in NHL history.

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TSN.CA / Cozens sets the tone as Canada keeps confidence in Czech

Mark Masters

Team Canada held an optional morning skate on Saturday.

Dylan Cozens leads Team Canada in scoring at the World Juniors and is leading off the ice as well with his calm demeanour. That's a byproduct of being raised by a dad who's a judge and a mom who's a lawyer.

"Both my parents have such stressful jobs so being able to handle the stress and pressure of deciding what happens to someone's life is something that definitely rubbed off on me," the Whitehorse native said.

Cozens is one of six returning players, who helped Canada roll through the quarterfinals and semifinals last year after a big win on New Year's Eve. He's looking for similar success this year starting tonight against the Czech Republic.

"We can't be too confident and we can't think we're going to have an easy win," the Buffalo Sabres first rounder said. "These guys beat the Russians and they play a disciplined game. They clog the middle."

"They block a lot of shots," noted Saginaw Spirit forward Cole Perfetti. "They pack it in in the D zone. They play a really good defensive game. They did that against Russia and wore them out. You got to stick with it."

Perfetti celebrated his 19th birthday yesterday. The team arranged for a cake, but other than that it was "kind of just another day in the bubble," the Winnipeg Jets first rounder said. There was some table tennis, beanbag toss and college football games on television.

"We're pretty levelheaded," Perfetti said. "We know what we can do, but at the same time we respect our opponents. You want to be confident. It's good to be confident in yourselves and your teammates and your abilities, but it can be dangerous and a fine line if you get too confident and almost become arrogant or cocky and that can kill a team."

What can Canada expect from the 'Jekyll and Hyde' Czechs?

The Czech Republic stunned Russia in the preliminary round, but they were also blown out by Sweden and Team USA. What should Canada make of their quarter-final opponent? James Duthie and Bob McKenzie preview Canada's first game of the knockout round.

If Canada is able to convert on the power play that will take a lot of the pressure off. The team is 5/15 on the man advantage so far with all five goals coming in blowout wins against Germany and Switzerland. They failed to click in the two closer games against Slovakia and Finland.

"No goals last game, but if you look at the momentum we created and the chances we generated, the math and statistics behind it say we should've generated a goal or two," said Perfetti. "The whole point of a power play is to score, but also build momentum and I think we did that."

It's hard to imagine that a top unit featuring Perfetti and Connor McMichael on the flanks, Bowen Byram up top, Peyton Krebs in the middle and Cozens in front can be held off the scoresheet for too long. Cozens and Krebs are playing in unfamiliar positions and slowly getting used to the roles.

Cozens was the last forward on the ice at yesterday's practice going over net-front positioning with assistant coach Michael Dyck.

"The biggest thing is just getting those flash screens and standing in front of the goalie as the guy is coming down the half wall and then moving right when he shoots," said Cozens, who played the net-front role at last year's World Juniors, but never in the Western Hockey League. "You have to be a distraction for guys, drawing their D-men down so guys can walk down lower."

Krebs, meanwhile, has been studying video of how Boston's Patrice Bergeron and Tampa's Brayden Point operate in the bumper spot in the NHL. What's he seeing?



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"Their ability to find holes," the Winnipeg Ice forward said. "A lot of PKs collapse to the middle and you just got to try to find holes with your stick, maybe not your body, and just open a lane up and even open lanes up for passes to go through you. So trying to do that the best I can and be an option for Perf or Mikes or Bo or whoever needs me."

The Czechs ranked eighth in penalty-kill percentage in the preliminary round allowing six goals on 15 chances.

McMichael led Canada with seven shots against the Finns, but failed to find the back of the net. He came painfully close a few times.

"Mikes had two or three posts on the power play," Perfetti pointed out.

Last year at the World Juniors, McMichael actually called his shot before the semifinal game against Finland telling linemate Ty Dellandrea he was going to "introduce myself to the back bar" before the first shift and then proceeding to open the scoring. This year, his linemate is calling the shot for him.

"He's due," said Cozens. "He had lots of chances last game, a few posts, so tonight he's coming in with a mindset that he's scoring and nobody's stopping him."

McMichael scored in all three of Canada's knockout stage games last year.

Krebs: We can't take the Czechs lightly, everything matters now

Peyton Krebs spoke with TSN's Mark Masters about his goal against Finland that made it a 3-0 game, Canada's mindset heading into the knockout stage, how the team will be ready to adjust should Alex Newhook not be available for the quarter-final, where Team Canada's power play is at, the energy that Jakob Pelletier brings to the team and more.

Devon Levi posted a .951 save percentage in 11 periods of action in the preliminary round and has remained sharp despite a light workload. Levi has yet to face more than 20 shots in any game.

"It's a tough game, mentally, to play, but I had a lot of practice with that last year," said Levi, who suited up for the Carleton Place Canadians in the Central Canada Hockey League. "I played for a good team and I had to be ready at any given moment for a good scoring chance even though I wasn't facing a lot of shots. But it is harder mentally to stay focused and to be ready rather than getting 40 shots and always being hot."

The Northeastern University freshman has yet to allow an even-strength goal in Edmonton and is confident that his mental strength and visualization technique will help him navigate the added pressure of an elimination game.

"I'm super grateful to be here and being grateful helps you take the pressure off," he explained. "I'm happy to be here. I'm happy to be playing for Team Canada. I'm happy to have a shot at a gold medal."

Levi, who has deleted all the social media apps from his phone, had a meeting with Hockey Canada mental performance consultant Ryan Hamilton on Friday to talk about his medal-round mindset.

"The main focus is just clearing your mind and breathing during the game and just forgetting about your thoughts," the Florida Panthers seventh rounder said. "It's easy to let your mind wander when you're not facing a lot of shots so just staying focused and concentrating on the puck and breathing helps a lot."

Levi won't be changing much in preparation for Czechs

Team Canada meets the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals on Saturday. The game also represents their first elimination game of the tournament, but goaltender Devon Levi and his teammates are trying to prepare for it like any other.

Team Canada lines at Friday's practice:

Holloway - McMichael - Cozens

Perfetti - Zary - Krebs

Quinn - Byfield - Pelletier

Mercer - Suzuki - Tomasino

Byram - Drysdale

Harley - Schneider

Guhle - Barron

Korczak (R) - Spence

Levi

Garand

Gauthier

Injured: Kirby Dach (wrist, out for the tournament), Alex Newhook (upper body, day-to-day)

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