



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 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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## Gold: Canes between the pipes

By Adam Gold

MORRISVILLE, N.C. — On Monday, the Carolina Hurricanes will open their third training camp under head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

The 10-day training camp precedes the 56-game regular season, which will begin with the Canes taking the ice at PNC on Jan. 21 for their first home game.

COVID-19 means players will be tested every day for the virus, and teams will follow hundreds of pages of protocols to limit the spread. Unlike in previous years, the public won't be able to watch the training camp.

In year one, we had no idea what to expect other than it was going to be the polar opposite of those under former bench boss Bill Peters. Last year, there was a lot of roster turnover, in spite of the fact that the 2018-19 version snapped a decade-long postseason drought. This year? I'm not sure there are any position, especially between the pipes, and that is where we will focus our attention on the roster breakdown.

But first, a few odds and ends...

The Hurricanes announced their training camp roster on Thursday, with 24 forwards, 10 defenseman and four goaltenders. It's smaller than it would normally be by roughly 10 or so players for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is that there will be no preseason games. It includes a couple of teenagers who were just signed to their entry-level deals in Seth Jarvis, this year's top pick (13th overall), as well as last year's 2nd rounder, Jamieson Rees. Both are centers, both are offensively productive and each are very intriguing prospects for the future.

Neither is expected to challenge for a roster spot this year, but I'll just say that in the Covid-19 age, ANYTHING is possible.

Two players not included were Ryan Suzuki, last year's first round pick who is currently skating with Team Canada at the IIHF World Junior Championships in Edmonton and depth center Clark Bishop. The first absence is self-explanatory. The second, well, I'm a bit befuddled by Bishop's exclusion.

Bishop is the perfect depth center for the Hurricanes. At this stage of his career within this organization he's not really anything more than a 4th line, checking center -- something he's very good at being. Sure, over the last year or so he's been passed by Morgan Geekie, Steven Lorentz and the three high picks from the last two seasons on the depth chart. But, if the Hurricanes are going to keep a few extra bodies, it's more likely to be someone like a Bishop than one of the better prospects. I feel like there's a story here because I just don't see a reason why Bishop wouldn't be invited to training camp.

Canada and the United States won their respective groups at the WJC, each advancing to the quarterfinals as the top seeds on their respective sides of the bracket. Ryan Suzuki scored

2 of Canada's 33 goals in the four games -- yeah, I said 33 goals. They'll meet Russia in the semifinals. I would expect Suzuki might join the group once that Tournament comes to a close.

The Russians beat Germany to advance with Canes prospect Vasili Ponomarev scoring the first goal, giving him three for the event, as they finished second, one point behind the USA in Group B.

Sweden placed third in that group, but Noel Gunler was one of their best players, scoring four times in the prelims. The Swedes fell to arch rival Finland in the knockout phase, but Gunler has garnered a lot of praise as one of the best players for Team Sweden. Zion Nybeck, another 2020 Hurricanes draftee had one assist in group play.

Now to the goaltending, a position that provides little mystery heading into the season.

I think it's important to start with where the club stood in the summer of 2018. Cam Ward's time here was over -- and truth be told, his body had just given in to the wear and tear of workhorse status -- and Scott Darling was an absolute mess. Unpopular in the locker room, unprepared to be a starter and unsuccessful in that role. It's worth pointing out that Darling failed to win consecutive starts at any point during his Hurricanes tenure.

But, Scott had an albatross of a contract and the Canes options were limited in who they could bring in to compete for the crease. Enter Petr Mrazek, a one-time starter in Detroit who'd seen his play decline and saw Carolina as a potential spot to rekindle his career. He signed for one year and a backup salary of \$1.5 million and gave the Hurricanes a pair of goaltenders that had not exactly proven reliable in big spots.

Then came the end-of-training camp hamstring injury to Darling, the subsequent waiver claim of Curtis McElhinney, and it appears that the Canes have lucked into a situation in which goaltending is not a liability. Note that I did not refer to the position as a strength, mostly because I don't think it is. But, the position has been good enough to keep the Canes in the playoff mix and Mrazek gives them a high end when he's on top of his game.

Petr has a pretty wide range of performance. He can be the player who closed 2019 on a tear, winning 12 of his last 15 starts with three shutouts and a .943 save percentage (SV%). He was also stellar in this year's bubble hockey playoffs, posting a .929 SV% in five starts. But, his late 2nd period lapse in concentration in allowing Patrice Bergeron's goal gave Boston the lead they would carry to the clinching win. And, that is the other side of Petr. For my money, it's something you can live with, especially when you consider how emotionally in tune he is with the team -- and his head coach.



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Petr, barring injury or a deterioration of his play, will be the likely leading man in Carolina's goaltending story this year.

James Reimer is the perfect compliment to Mrazek's personality. Steady, unassuming and reliable. Statistically speaking, Reimer was the better goalie between him and Mrazek last year. He delivered a 14-6-2 record in 25 starts with a .914 SV%. Then, with a somewhat condensed postseason schedule, Reimer won 2 of his 3 starts with a .934 SV%. He stays ready, is a great teammate and is definitely more even-keeled than his stablemate. On and off the ice.

We keep saying "at some point Alex Nedeljkovic is going to get his chance", and it's possible that came a year ago, just before the pause when the Canes lost both Mrazek and Reimer to injury. You remember the David Ayers game, right? Well, the Canes needed to dip into their organizational depth at goalie as a result and, well, it wasn't a thing of beauty.

Ned and Anton Forsberg split six starts in the absence of Mrazek and Reimer, winning twice and losing the other four. Overall, the 2014 second round pick was 1-2-1 with a less-than-inspiring .887 SV%. But, the last impression was his best, shutting out the Penguins over the final two periods in a 6-2 win in Pittsburgh as the Canes were chasing down a wild card spot a few days before the season screeched to a halt.

Nedeljkovic is on a 1-way deal this season, and the NHL has asked teams to carry three goalies this year, so he's going to be around barring a trade.

Antoine Bibeau was signed during the offseason to add depth to the organization in goal. He's played in 4 NHL games, two each for the Avalanche (last year) and the Maple Leafs (2016-17), and is more likely going to spend time in the AHL or on a taxi squad.

For some reason, the national hockey media is always targeting a goalie for the Hurricanes. Whether via trade, free agent signing or the draft, the Canes always seem to be at, or near, the top of the list of interested parties. But, from where I sit, goaltending is well down the list of things I'd fix about the Hurricanes. I just don't see it as something that holds them back.

For the last two years, it's been more than good enough to make the playoffs. I suspect that to remain the same during this four month sprint of a season.

The Canes' first game of the 2021 season is just 10 days away when they will travel to Detroit to take on the Red Wings



## Brind'Amour Outlines Expectations Heading Into Camp

Head coach illustrates what it means to be a Hurricane

by Michael Smith

At Prospects Development Camp in late June 2018, just over a month into Rod Brind'Amour's tenure as head coach of the Carolina Hurricanes, he was asked about expectations for the team.

"Playoffs!" someone yelled from the crowd, which hadn't seen the Canes compete in the Stanley Cup Playoffs in nearly a decade.

"Not playoffs," Brind'Amour responded. "We're trying to be the best team in the league. That's our goal."

Fast forward two-and-a-half years. The Canes have qualified for the playoffs in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 2001-02. Now entering into the 56-game 2020-21 season, they have an opportunity to make a third consecutive postseason appearance for the first time since the franchise was based in Hartford.

While that might be a goal, it's not the goal. The expectation is to be the best, a message Brind'Amour reiterated to his

players, who were masked and physically distanced from one another in PNC Arena's Arena Club on Sunday afternoon.

On a day that is largely procedural - physicals, COVID-19 testing and headshots (in a safe environment) all happened on Sunday morning - the team meeting serves as a tone setter for the grind ahead. This year is, of course, a bit different. A smaller group of 38 players is in town, and there are just eight days of on-ice work in camp.

The constant, though, is the expectation level.

The bar, Brind'Amour said, was raised in 2018. It's now up to the Canes to meet and exceed those expectations, fighting for the inches that, each and every day, will set the team apart in a competitive league.

It's the challenge to become a C5 Hurricane - a Category 5 Hurricane, the strongest and fiercest of them all.

That's the expectation. That's the goal. That's the championship culture.

"It starts tomorrow," Brind'Amour closed the meeting.

And with that, a new season has begun.



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## Five questions facing the Hurricanes in the 2021 season

Can the Hurricanes take the next step and compete for a Stanley Cup this season?

By Andrew Schnittker

The 2021 NHL season will truly be one like no other. The Hurricanes will play 56 games from Jan. 14 through the second weekend in May, when they hope they'll start a deep playoff run. They'll play in a new division, and no doubt face some new challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As training camp begins, the Hurricanes find themselves faced with some key questions, the answers to which will determine whether or not the team can achieve its ultimate goal of competing for, and winning, the Stanley Cup. Some are familiar, some are brought on by the unique circumstances.

Let's dive in and take a look:

1. Is the goaltending good enough? We might as well start with the question that seemingly is there at the start of every season, and will until it's emphatically answered. For years, the refrain was that if the Hurricanes could just get league-average goaltending, they'd be a playoff team. They've gotten that from Petr Mrazek, James Reimer and Curtis McElhinney over the last two seasons, and, lo and behold, the Hurricanes made back-to-back playoffs for the first time since 2001 and 2002.

But the goal has changed. It's not just to make the playoffs, but to make a deep run and compete for the Cup. The consensus seems to be that Mrazek and Reimer, who are both entering contract seasons, are good, but not great goalies, who lack the higher gear needed for a deep run. Whether or not that's true will determine how far the Hurricanes go.

Mrazek has been erratic, at times showing the ability to flat out dominate and steal games, and at others looking very beatable. Reimer was steady and dependable for the Hurricanes last year, but the question of whether or not he can hit that higher gear remains. Carolina's team save percentage of .903 last season ranked tied for 16th in the league, and the team would probably like to see that number climb.

It was rumored the Hurricanes looked at the goalie market this offseason but opted to stand pat, sticking with Mrazek and Reimer over change for change's sake. If they don't like what they see to start the season, might they look at the trade market and the possibility of adding someone like Darcy Kuemper? Regardless, what the team gets from its goalies will go a long way in determining the fate of this season.

2. Is there enough depth scoring behind Aho, Svechnikov and Teravainen? The Canes' top trio of Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teravainen was flat-out dominant last

season, combining for 77 goals and 190 points. The problem was that there often wasn't enough behind them.

The Hurricanes could have used another top-six forward this offseason, but simply didn't have the cap space. The good news is there are plenty of options for depth behind the big three. Martin Necas is coming off a solid rookie season, and could be primed to take another step forward with more ice time, similar to Svechnikov from year one to year two.

The Canes added Vincent Trocheck as a solution for the No. 2 center spot at the trade deadline, and will hope to see that kind of production from him in his first "full" regular season with the team. Trocheck recapturing his form from the 2017-18 season would be a big development for the Hurricanes, but even if he can score at a 20-goal, 50-point pace, it'll add plenty.

Wingers Nino Niederreiter and Ryan Dzingel are both coming off disappointing seasons, and the Canes will hope one can bounce back to earn a top-six role. They've both certainly shown the ability in the past.

The penciled-in checking line of Jordan Staal, Warren Foegele and Jesper Fast is likely to be light on offense, but if the Canes can build a second line, a bottom six of those three, either Dzingel or Niederreiter and some combination of Jordan Martinook, Brock McGinn and Morgan Geekie could provide enough secondary scoring.

There's plenty of potential for scoring depth past the top line, but little in the way of sure things. The Hurricanes can be pretty confident in getting production from the blue line. Jaccob Slavin is coming off a career season, Jake Gardiner should be in line for a bounce back and Brady Skjei has something to offer in that area as well.

And, of course, No. 1 blueliner Dougie Hamilton was sitting at 14 goals and 40 points in just 47 games when he suffered his leg injury last season, and should once again be a primary source of offense.

Speaking of which...

3. How will the contract negotiations factor in? As mentioned above, both goalies are entering the last year of their contracts. So are Svechnikov, who will be an RFA after this season, and Hamilton, who will be a UFA. It won't be cheap to retain both, but, as we've explored here and here, it will be doable.

The question is, if the Hurricanes enter the regular season (and they're running out of run way there) without contract extensions for one or both, will it be a distraction? The team likely has too strong of leadership starting with head coach Rod Brind'Amour for that to happen, but the questions will certainly be there.



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Svechnikov will be back. The team has plenty of leverage with him as a restricted free agent, and both general manager Don Waddell and owner Tom Dundon have made it clear he's not going anywhere.

Hamilton is the bigger question. The Canes have made it clear they want to sign him, but as a pending unrestricted top tier defenseman, he'll command a pretty penny. If he remains unsigned as the April trade deadline draws near, do the Hurricanes do the unthinkable and explore the market for him? The idea of trading Hamilton during a good season for the team is almost unthinkable, but the idea of risking losing him for nothing is also unpleasant.

The longer Hamilton remains unsigned, the stronger the possibility of a difficult situation becomes.

4. How will the Hurricanes fare in the new division? With Canadian teams forced to remain north of the border for this season, the NHL realigned its divisions. The Hurricanes will leave behind the old Metropolitan Division for a new Central made up of the Columbus Blue Jackets, Tampa Bay Lightning, Dallas Stars, Florida Panthers, Nashville Predators, Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks. The top four teams in each division will make the playoffs.

On paper, while the Hurricanes do join both of last season's finalists (though Tampa will be without Nikita Kucherov for the regular season), this is a significantly easier road to travel. The Red Wings and Blackhawks figure to be among the league's

bottom feeders, and the Canes leave behind contenders like the Penguins, Flyers and Capitals, as well as teams like the Rangers and Devils that they've historically struggled against.

Can the Canes take advantage? There's no reason not to expect the team to finish at least third among this group, but how they adjust to this new slate, as well as playing the same seven teams over 56 games, will go a long way to determining this season's outcome.

5. Who has another gear? For a team looking to take the next step, the Canes had a very quiet offseason, with Jesper Fast being the only notable addition. Most improvements will have to be internal barring trades.

The good news is a young team like the Hurricanes presents plenty of opportunities for internal improvement with players continuing to grow. Martin Necas stands out as an obvious example of a player that should be ready to take another step in his sophomore season, similar to Andrei Svechnikov last year. Speaking of Svechnikov, there's a good chance that, entering year three, he also has another level to reach.

It's not even unfathomable to expect Sebastian Aho, who was two tallies shy of joining the 40-goal club last year, to take another step in his third year as a full-time center.

Getting these kinds of improvements from their young stars could go a long way in helping the Hurricanes become a bona fide Stanley Cup Contender.

## Carolina Hurricanes 2021 Training Camp Guide

The most bizarre NHL season anyone has ever seen begins today with the start of training camp. What's new, and what should we watch for this season?

By Brian LeBlanc

A couple of months ago, when speaking to Canes Country about the upcoming season, Carolina Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said that he thought NHL players keep themselves in such good shape during the offseason that they wouldn't need more than about a week to get ready to start the new season, and could do without preseason games to help move things along even faster.

Brind'Amour was only off by about three days, but by and large, we're about to find out how right he was.

The Hurricanes begin their belated training camp today, and just like the season to follow, it will look considerably different than what fans - and, for that matter, the team - are used to. What follows are answers to some frequently asked questions about camp this year, as well as some more details on how this very strange season will look.

How many players are coming to camp?

The Hurricanes will have 38 players in camp, 34 skaters and four goaltenders. (The NHL is limiting teams to a maximum of 36 skaters, so the Hurricanes have a nearly full house.) Included among those are Seth Jarvis and Jamieson Rees, who just signed their ELCs last week, and a bunch of likely AHL players. The Hurricanes have four prospects playing in the World Junior championships, none of whom will be in

camp (and at least two of them, Ryan Suzuki and Vasily Ponomarev, would be here otherwise).

Two notable omissions: Clark Bishop and Roland McKeown, both of whom cleared waivers last week. GM Don Waddell says that McKeown will stay in Sweden this year; there is no word yet on Bishop's future plans (which presumably involve the AHL). Stay tuned.

When are the sessions, and can I go?

Today the players will take their physicals and pre-camp testing prior to a 2:00 team meeting at PNC Arena. All of the other on-ice activities during camp will take place at the new Wake Competition Center in Morrisville, beginning with the first camp session at 9:30 tomorrow. The players will be split into two groups, practicing at 9:30 and 11:00 each day, but we don't know yet who is in which group.

And, to answer the other question: no, camp is closed to the public this year. Blame COVID, because typically the Hurricanes are among the most accessible NHL teams for training camp sessions and practices. Not this year, though; the Canes will, however, live stream camp on the team website. A limited number of media members will be allowed in to watch camp, but won't have any interaction with the team in person. All media availabilities will be held over Zoom.

Since there are more than 23 players, some will be assigned to the AHL, right?

Yes, that's the plan, but the timing will be different than usual because the AHL won't begin play until February 5. In a



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normal year the AHL training camps follow about a week behind the start of NHL camps; this year, the NHL will be well into its season before the AHL gets going. In other words, it's likely that the Max McCormicks and Joakim Ryans of the world will hang around camp longer than they typically would.

How will the salary cap work?

Generally the same as you're used to it working, with a few different twists. The salary cap this year will be set at \$81.5 million, the same as it was last year, and teams have to be cap compliant by the day before the season starts; this year, that's January 12 at 5:00 Eastern. The players will be paid their full salary, despite the shortened season.

One big change this year, unsurprisingly, involves players who test positive for COVID during the season. In the event of a positive test, a team may move the player directly to long-term injured reserve (LTIR) without the added step of a doctor signing off on the move, a failsafe that keeps teams from gaming LTIR under normal circumstances. That means any player who tests positive can have his roster spot opened up and his salary removed from the cap for a minimum of ten games or 24 days, should the team elect to do so.

The other big change to the salary cap comes with the advent of the taxi squad, which we'll get to in a second.

What's the schedule going to be like?

It's very similar to a baseball schedule. Teams will only face the teams in their division, and more often than not - although not exclusively - teams will play two games in a row against the same team in the same location. The regular season will run until May 8, and the Stanley Cup Playoffs (comprising 16 teams) will begin May 11. The Stanley Cup will be awarded no later than July 15.

The top four teams in each division will make the playoffs, and there will be no wild cards. Once the playoffs reach the third round, the NHL will re-seed the remaining teams, so teams from any two divisions could play for the Stanley Cup. (Yes, a Carolina/Washington Stanley Cup Final is possible.)

OK, so about the taxi squad...

The taxi squad is the Schrödinger's cat of the roster this year: players on the squad will simultaneously be on and not on the NHL roster. Because of quarantine requirements surrounding players recalled from the minor leagues, not to mention the open question of whether AHL teams will actually compete this year, the NHL created the taxi squads so that teams would have a game-ready pool of players available to step in at a moment's notice.

The four to six taxi squad players, a range established by the NHL, will be allowed to practice and, if the team desires, travel

with the NHL team. Taxi squad players will be paid their AHL salaries, and will be subject to waivers if they require them for a minor-league assignment to move between the active roster and the taxi squad.

Each team must have three goaltenders available, either by having all three on the active roster or by having one on the taxi squad, at all times. If the third goalie is on the taxi squad, he must travel with the team. There will be no EBUGs this year, so the third goalie may step in regardless of any other roster regulations if his services are required.

Who's eligible for a taxi squad assignment?

It's the same rules as a normal minor-league assignment: any player is eligible, unless the player has a no-movement clause, as long as he clears waivers if required. But there's one additional category of player who's eligible this year: junior-aged players who are typically not eligible for an AHL assignment may be assigned to the taxi squad (or to the AHL itself) if their junior team is not playing. Jarvis, in particular, is impacted by this, because the WHL has not announced a date to begin play and if their season is cancelled, he may remain with the Hurricanes all season.

What about the salary cap?

On its face, the taxi squad is just an extension of the AHL salary cap rules: players will have up to \$1,095,000 of their cap hit removed from the NHL team's cap while they are on the taxi squad. This is the same rule that has been in effect for many years, preventing teams from burying high cap hits in the minors without any negative cap consequences.

But there's a big change this season because of the fact that the taxi squad will be allowed to practice with the NHL club. Players, especially those who do not require waivers for a minor-league assignment, will be allowed to move back and forth between the taxi squad and the active roster at will, giving teams the opportunity to bank unused cap space. There will be a million paper assignments to and from the taxi squad on a daily basis, all of which will be in the service of saving a few bucks on the cap. Every dollar counts, after all.

Can players be added to and removed from the taxi squad?

Yes, they can, but it can't happen right away. A player not on the active roster can be added to the taxi squad after a seven-day quarantine with four negative COVID tests. Players can also be removed (for example, to join the AHL team) but must follow the protocol of the league they're joining.

Any other questions? Drop them in the comments and we'll do our best to answer them!

## **TODAY'S LINKS**

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article248133520.html>

<https://www.wralsportsfan.com/gold-canes-between-the-pipes/19455707/>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/rod-brindamour-outlines-expectations-heading-into-training-camp/c-319954518>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2021/1/4/22212565/carolina-hurricanes-goaltending-dougie-hamilton-andrei-svechnikov>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2021/1/3/22211123/carolina-hurricanes-nhl-2021-training-camp-guide>



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## SportScan

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

1197793 Carolina Hurricanes

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

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

JANUARY 03, 2021 07:00 AM,

Carolina head coach Rod Brind'Amour talks with the team during the Carolina Hurricanes' on-ice workouts at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C., Monday, July 13, 2020.

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.

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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.

News Observer LOADED: 01.04.2021

1197896 Websites

The Athletic / Matt Beniers' non-stop motor has helped Team USA and his draft stock

By Scott Wheeler Jan 3, 2021



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2021

EDMONTON — Matt Beniers and USA Hockey's under-18 team had just finished a 13-hour trip from Plymouth, Mich., to Ralston, Neb., when they were told to get back on the team's sleeper bus because they had to turn around and go home.

Team USA was in Ralston to face the USHL's Omaha Lancers and Beniers was just about to return from a concussion he'd suffered two weeks earlier in a Feb. 27 game against the Youngstown Phantoms. But now it was March 13, the world had changed, the game had been cancelled, and USA staff had to break the news to the players: Their two-year run with the country's national team development program (NTDP) may have just come to an abrupt end.

For a while, Beniers, who'd missed the team's previous two games, found that news a tough pill to swallow.

"It was rough," he said. "We all got cut out (of the program) really quick. My last game for USA was before I wanted it to be."

But nearly 300 days after that moment, on the first day of a new year, Beniers is at Edmonton's Sutton Place hotel preparing for a quarterfinal game at the world juniors.

The year 2021, will change his life forever when he's likely to be among the first forwards picked in its NHL draft. But for now, he's back to wearing that jersey again as the player each of his teammates and coaches call their "engine."

"You never know when you're going to have to stop wearing that USA jersey forever, so it's extra special to be able to wear it again," Beniers says. "Just being here is an honour, just to be able to play again for USA."

When the under-18 team's season first got cancelled, Beniers did what he always does: He got to work.

His dad Bob, a former college football player at Cornell University, has a gym in their basement, so even as facilities near his home in Hingham, Mass., remained closed under local restrictions for a month and a half, he was able to train with dumbbells, a squat rack, a bench, and everything else he needed.

He knew this summer was going to be a pivotal one. It was the offseason before his freshman year at the University of Michigan, the summer before his first real crack at the world juniors. So no matter how it looked, or what the circumstances were, he wanted to put in more time than his draft-eligible peers.

"I tried to hit the gym hard and work on my nutrition so that I could gain some weight going into college because I've always been a skinnier guy and that's just kind of how my body is. My dad was like that and I'm like that, so that's always been my focus," said Beniers. "That comes with time. I'm one of those guys that can put on weight over a couple of months and then lose it in a week by just being on the ice every day. Some added weight and muscle will help a lot."

When facilities eventually did open, Beniers then carried progress made at home into his training with Foxborough, Mass., strength coach Brian McDonough's Edge Performance Systems, and later Stride Envy skating and skills coach Adam Nicholas.

With McDonough and Nicholas, he trained and skated alongside NHL prospects like the Wild's Matt Boldy, the Devils' Patrick Moynihan, the Ducks' Henry Thrun, the Canadiens' Sean Farrell, the Rangers' Brett Berard, and the Avalanche's Alex Newhook, among others.

In his spare time, he also started a hockey camp for kids in the driveway at his house with long-time friend and Harvard commit Bobby Landry, so that they could have somewhere outdoors to practice.

"It just kind of started as a shooting and stickhandling clinic. Kids would just come and work on that for an hour before a workout. It was fun," Beniers said. "That got me started in the summer, really. It took up some time for us."

After arriving at the University of Michigan in September, Beniers then became an immediate favourite of the coaching staff.

"He's just a pleasure to coach. He's got a twinkle in his eye. He's very respectful. He wants to get better. He's very coachable and approachable, and not every player has that. That helps separate him," said Michigan associate head coach Bill Muckalt. "I can't say enough about him."

Though he was only 17-years-old when he arrived on campus, Beniers is used to life as the youngest player on his team. A late 2002 birthday, Beniers, who will be selected in a predominantly 2003-born draft class, spent his two years at the national program playing above his draft class' age group. In 2018-2019, his first year with USA Hockey, Beniers posted 20 points in 20 games with the under-18 team, a team comprised predominantly of 2019 draftees. Last year, playing entirely with the under-18 team, he played alongside the country's top 2020 draft eligibles.

So when he arrived on campus to join the Wolverines, he already knew many of his freshman and sophomore teammates.

He was also mature enough to make the decision not to live in the freshmen dorms. Instead, he and two of those teammates longtime teammates with USA Hockey and now with Michigan, freshmen Jacob Truscott (a fifth-round pick of the Canucks) and Thomas Bordeleau (a second-round pick of the Sharks), decided to find a house together.

"We figured that everyone would be packed into the dorms and we didn't have to be in a dorm with all of these people who aren't getting tested all the time. It worked out well because the other freshmen that went to the dorms actually ended up leaving the dorms because there was an outbreak a couple of months ago and they had to send everyone out," Beniers said.

That maturity has him excelling in the classroom, too. Though he's undeclared as a freshman, Beniers is debating between pursuing Michigan's pre-med program or its business school.

"I've always had good grades. Growing up, everyone in my family always stressed that school is right up there with hockey. It's family, school, hockey. So I've always prioritized it that way and then I also just find it interesting, especially the pre-med route. I really enjoy those classes," Beniers said.

None of it — the school, the move, the new life, the pandemic, the daunting draft year — intimidated him.

"I wasn't nervous. Once I got there, the whole team was so welcoming. And then it all just kind of just fell into place and we did the right things at Michigan by staying away from people and wearing a mask everywhere, and then we were able to play really early on because of that, which was big," Beniers said.

"And I'm not trying to worry about the draft too much. I tell people that I got to watch a lot of my good friends go through it at the NTDP and I saw the things that guys did that helped them in the draft process, but I also saw the things that happened that made them think too much about it and get in their head about it. So I'm just trying to enjoy the whole process and not put too much pressure on myself, regardless of the circumstances and the uncertainty."

The hockey didn't intimidate him, either.

"I knew I was ready," he said. "I wasn't too nervous about the hockey aspect, either, honestly. I've been playing against all of these guys."

Despite his age, Beniers thrived in his on-ice environment, assuming an important role on a loaded team from the start. The Wolverines coaches noticed his athleticism right away. After growing up playing several other sports competitively (including baseball, lacrosse and soccer), Beniers has always been one of the fast players on his teams.

"He skates very well, he can kill penalties, he's great on the power play. He's going to continue to get stronger as he physically matures in the



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weight room and it's just going to make him that much more effective," Muckalt said. "He has been really good for us, his practice habits are outstanding, and he makes others around him better. As a coach, you want more Matty Beniers' that's for sure."

When it came time to join Team USA's world junior selection camp in Plymouth in December, Beniers had already posted six points in eight games with the Wolverines.

Cam York, one of those Wolverines sophomores who Beniers also played with for 20 games two years ago as an underager on the under-18 team, said Beniers fit in immediately at Michigan with the team and its system.

"He works so hard, it's just a matter of time until a chance comes his way. The puck just seems to find him," York said. "He earns what he gets and that's why I respect him so much as a player."

And when Beniers started the camp centering the team's second line, alongside Boldy (one of those summer training partners) and Canadiens prospect Cole Caufield, Muckalt wasn't surprised by the recently-turned 18-year-old's role on the country's top under-20 team.

"Cole is a tremendous talent who can score and you want someone to get him the puck, so it makes sense that Matt is that guy. His biggest attribute is if he's an automobile, his motor is always redlining, his RPM is always high," Muckalt said. "He hunts pucks on the forecheck, he's very effective in all three zones, and he's very effective putting back pressure on and retrieving pucks, whether that's helping defensive zone coverage, neutral zone transition, or the forecheck."

On the last day of camp, Team USA's world juniors general manager John Vanbiesbrouck talked about Beniers in similar automobile-like terms.

"Matty's an accelerated player. His motor is always going, he can play centre, he can play the wing, and when you're that usable you can play a lot of minutes. He's probably our most well-rounded 200-foot player," Vanbiesbrouck said. "He really cares about every detail in the game. I'm not going to compare him to a Jonathan Toews but when you look for completion in a game he's got it. And most importantly he really fits this tournament well. This is a speed tournament and he's got a lot of speed to his game."

Beniers was also the talk of his teammates throughout camp.

"He's just such a hard worker and his competitive drive in practice really puts him above the rest of the players," said Tyler Kleven, a former NTDP teammate and Senators prospect. "He's so shifty, he's got a good shot, and he's just a good overall player."

Berard pointed to Beniers as the player who had impressed him most.

"Seeing him here, he has really wowed me on the ice seeing how much he has developed at Michigan," Berard said.

Kings defence prospect Brock Faber, who'd just spent two years with Beniers, pointed to how hard it is to defend Beniers in practice.

"He's unbelievably skilled, he protects the puck, he has great vision. He's tough to go against but awesome to have on your team. Matty's been awesome," Faber said, smiling. "He's been a great friend and a great teammate. He has a really bright future."

By the time the tournament started and Caufield got to play on his line, he knew firsthand what it was like to be on the other side of the ice from Beniers after having been matched up against him in two early-season NCAA games between Caufield's University of Wisconsin Badgers and the Wolverines.

"He has impressed me a lot. He's so strong and fast. He never really gets knocked off the puck. He's a 200-foot player and he's exciting to play with. He just always knows where to be," Caufield said. "He kind of draws guys towards him which leaves me open so it's nice to play with a guy

like him who is always moving and taking time and space away. It leaves me free."

Beniers picked up his first point of the tournament with a primary assist to Boldy's in Team USA's second game of the round-robin against Austria. He added a second primary assist to Bobby Brink in Team USA's third game against the Czech Republic. In the quarterfinals against Slovakia, it was Beniers who, trusted to play with the net empty, scored his first goal of the tournament to make it 5-2. When it was over, his 18:12 ice time in their first elimination game was second-most among Team USA forwards.

"I think he's very worthy of the ice he's receiving. He's got a great motor and he can really go," said Team USA head coach Nate Leaman after the game, echoing the common refrain. "He's one of our best penalty killers ... he's always going. And with him and (Alex) Turcotte always going, we've got motors driving those top two lines. He has really done well."

Beniers says he's just trying to be himself, to be the motor. That's all he can control and all he can do as he continues to receive praise.

"I wouldn't say too much has changed about my game. I've just been trying to get bigger and stronger and finish my chances. But a lot of my game has stayed the same and I'm just trying to progress that," Beniers said. "The way I think the game, the way I skate, the way I move, the way I create space and win battles, a lot of that has stayed the same."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.04.2021

1197897 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' raised expectations a welcome change in Bergevin era

Eric Engels

January 3, 2021, 6:36 PM

MONTREAL — Marc Bergevin spoke over 2000 words in just under 32 minutes to open Canadiens training camp Sunday, but what he didn't say was just as relevant as what he did.

"We hope to make the playoffs and see what happens," was never uttered.

Hallelujah!

Bergevin's reliable opening salvo of failed seasons past was replaced by "we have internal expectations that are high, and we can't hide from that."

Sounds like a hit!

"Excited," was a word Bergevin said not once, not twice, but seven times.

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

"How did you feel driving into work today," the GM was asked.

"Excited," Bergevin responded. "I'm excited."

Go on...

"Every time you start a new season, you're always excited, but I've watched a little bit of the skate this morning and I like what we've done," Bergevin said.

He should.



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Ahead of a season that threatens to throw every team more curveballs than Clayton Kershaw would in a calendar year—with the ever-present threat of a COVID-19 outbreak and injuries looming—Bergevin spent the last number of months adding key pieces at every position and rounding the Canadiens into a team that should have greater ambitions than just hopefully making it and seeing what happens.

First came Jake Allen, the goaltender Bergevin traded for back on Sept. 2, the one he hesitated to refer to as a backup on Sunday.

"We have two really good goalies to approach the schedule we'll have this year," Bergevin said of the 56-game block that will feature 10 sets of back-to-back games for the Canadiens.

Remaining Time -1:00

Perry's playoff performance, track record will be asset for Canadiens

Of Joel Edmundson—the six-foot-four defenceman Bergevin traded for on Sept. 12 and signed four days later to a four-year, \$14-million contract—the GM said he'll bring a "presence" to Montreal's already-bulky blue line, which will also feature feisty and fierce rookie Alexander Romanov.

Josh Anderson, who brings "size and some skill," according to Bergevin, was added up front. And Tyler Toffoli—he of multiple 20-goal seasons—was signed for his "scoring touch."

Most recently, Michael Frolik—a veteran of 850 games—was brought in for depth, and that was just before Corey Perry was also signed for that.

Not just for depth, but for this, too:

"It sends a message to the league and to our own players," Bergevin said about the Stanley Cup winner, noted playoff performer and member of the exclusive 'Triple Gold Club.'

The message?

"We mean business, we're here to win, and we could play any way you want to play," Bergevin said.

It sure rings different than the message the Canadiens were sending over the last few seasons as a team firmly entrenched in the early stages of a reset.

That team wasn't designed for versatility. This one is.

With five Stanley Cup winners added, with more punch and pugnacity featured and with speed still at the core of its composition, this Canadiens team appears ready for more.

"Again, you can put anything on paper, (but) it doesn't matter until you start playing games and having the results," Bergevin cautioned.

But that's about as far as he went to temper expectations.

Bergevin even raised them for now, and for at least a few seasons to follow.

"We have 56 games to play and we're putting the best team available to us on the ice, and we haven't sacrificed our short- or long-term future to put this team together," he said. "People from the NHL who want to say we've bet everything on this season as if we were playing poker and we pushed all our chips in, we haven't done that. We added elements without giving anything away that's relevant to our future. We've kept our prospects and kept our (high) draft picks, so the team is well-placed for this year and for years to come."

Notice served.

How much does Bergevin like this group? Enough to say that, provided everyone remains healthy between now and the start of the season on Jan. 13, he doesn't anticipate making any other additions.

There's no room for any, regardless. Bergevin has gone from habitually spending below the upper limit of the NHL's salary cap in recent years to

surpassing it by over a million dollars this year—a situation he'll manage on the daily with capologist John Sedgwick and one that will require the Canadiens to begin the season with less than 23 players on the active roster.

Remaining Time -1:06

Why Bergevin believes trades will not happen during 2021 NHL season

There will be paper transactions aplenty—fluid movement between the NHL, the four-to-six man taxi squad the team can carry and the American Hockey League affiliate in Laval—all in the aim of keeping the Canadiens cap compliant and deep.

That part will be essential. Especially with trade dynamics severely affected by coronavirus and North American border restrictions.

"I think it was (Pittsburgh Penguins GM) Jimmy Rutherford that mentioned that trade—there will probably be none this year," Bergevin said. "Quarantine...it's going to be difficult to get a player from the States..."

And it's going to be harder to get one from Canadian rivals who now make up the North Division the Canadiens are competing in.

As Bergevin noted, the competition will be tighter than tight above the 49th parallel.

"We know only four teams will make the playoffs, and so three will miss—and they'll be good teams, too," he said.

But Bergevin doesn't believe the Canadiens will be one of them.

He's barely even leaving room for that possibility, and that's a welcome change around these parts.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.04.2021

1197898 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers focused on improving even-strength play to become true contenders

Mark Spector

January 3, 2021, 4:57 PM

EDMONTON — For most of six months, the Edmonton Oilers had a pretty good thing going last season. But a week in August erased much of it, as the team that sat at or near the top of the Pacific Division all season long bombed out in the Qualifying Round.

Forgotten by many was the fact the Oilers were just three points behind the Pacific-leading Vegas Golden Knights, five points above the playoff cut-off line, and had the most points and winning percentage of any Canadian club.

So the question as this team opened training camp Sunday at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology — pushed out of Rogers Place by the World Juniors — is simple:

Which team should we focus on as we try to predict the 2021 season? The good Oilers of October through March? Or the bad Oilers of August?

"That's an interesting question," began team captain Connor McDavid. "It's hard to just dismiss the (71) games that we played ... but we remember the season based on what we did last. And we didn't play very good, obviously, (in the Qualifying Round)."

McDavid believes Oilers have done a 'great job' with new acquisitions



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So, Connor. What is your final answer?

"I think we build on what we worked on all season long, continue to build on that. We've added some new pieces here, which are exciting, and we'll come into camp Day 1 here ready to go."

Leon Draisaitl? Your thoughts?

"We're looking at the team that showed it pretty much all season," he said with confidence. "We were playing for a division title. That's the team we want to be, and that's the team that I think we will be. Obviously the playoffs didn't go the way we hoped; we weren't as prepared as we should have been. But I think we're looking at that team that was playing for a division title."

Let's look at it this way: If you were judging the Blackhawks, would you focus on the team that had a nice week in August versus Edmonton? Or would your template be the 12th-place team that was six points out of the playoffs on March 12, that led the NHL in scoring chances allowed?

Yes, the Oilers absolutely stunk against Chicago. And when looking for improvements, they can clearly find some that apply to both segments of their season.

Draisaitl says Oilers look like a team playing for division title

"I don't think we have a problem scoring goals. It's keeping the puck out of our net," said McDavid, when asked about what his team will focus on to try and become a true contender. "A lot has been made about that. No one's putting their head in the sand here. Everyone understands where we're at, and we've got to keep the puck out of our net if we want to be successful."

Let's break that down a bit: Edmonton finished 15th in the NHL last season allowing 3.03 goals against per game. However, at five-on-five it ranked 26th in the NHL.

In short, special teams carried this club. And we all know that special teams get mitigated in the playoffs, where less penalties are called.

So we asked Draisaitl where the focus should be?

"Definitely our five-on-five play. Whether it's defensively or offensively, we can be better in both areas. Our special teams were really good last year ... but our five-on-five game can improve," he said.

General manager Ken Holland has taken a fairly good regular season team and made it deeper, with adds like Kyle Turris, Tyson Barrie, Dominik Kahun and Slater Koekkoek. Where forwards like James Neal, Alex Chiasson and Jujhar Khaira were once walk-on starters, now they're being forced to earn spots in the lineup.

The goaltending is iffy, sure, but it was good enough to produce a division contender last season — despite playing behind a team that ranked 24th in the NHL in scoring chances allowed per 60:00, per Natural Stat Trick.

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

"Last season when we were playing our best we were a five-man unit on the ice and everyone was working together," said Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, the longest serving Oiler. "The kind of style we have success with is the skating style. There's constant pressure, with the second and third forward reading off the first guy and D-men ready to pinch. Once everybody starts working together like that, that's when we've had success."

The Oilers long ago figured out how to play entertaining hockey. But this is Nugent-Hopkins' 10th year in Edmonton. They still haven't figured out how to win.

Even the new guy, Barrie, knows that is the true goal in Edmonton.

"It's probably no secret, without even talking to the staff or anything, what this team's goal should be," Barrie said. "That is to take the next step and

contend for a Stanley Cup. We've got a Canadian division we've got to get through first and make the playoffs first and foremost.

"But the goal for this team is obviously a lot grander than that."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.04.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks expect veteran Travis Hamonic to help guide young defence corps

Iain MacIntyre

January 3, 2021, 5:57 PM

VANCOUVER -- On the 10th day of Christmas, the Vancouver Canucks signed defenceman Travis Hamonic.

The lords-a-leaping were general manager Jim Benning and coach Travis Green, who saw the backwards step their team suffered in free agency last October narrow considerably with Sunday's addition of Hamonic on a professional tryout agreement.

Don't let the PTO aspect of the transaction fool you. When concussed winger Micheal Ferland and his \$3.5-million cap hit are shifted to long-term injured reserve just before the season starts on Jan. 13, the 30-year-old Hamonic should join the Canucks' roster on a bargain one-year contract.

The sides are believed to have established parameters for the deal.

It will complete an upgrade of the Vancouver blue line, which lost steady second- and third-pairing defencemen Chris Tanev and Troy Stecher in free agency, but have replaced them with first- and second-pairing players in Nate Schmidt and Hamonic.

Why Canucks will be in tough to make playoffs in the North division

This improvement should be enough to offset the free-agent loss of starting goalie Jacob Markstrom, although new Canuck Braden Holtby and incumbent prospect-backup Thatcher Demko still need to perform better in 2021 than they did last season.

Players underwent physical and medical testing Sunday ahead of Monday's first training camp practice sessions at Rogers Arena. Meanwhile, the Canucks' projected lineup looks strong enough to return to the Stanley Cup playoffs next spring in the extraordinary all-Canadian division that starts a 56-game schedule in 10 days.

"He's an experienced player that we know can come in and help us," Benning said Sunday of Hamonic during a videoconference with reporters. "I'm excited that he chose to come in and sign a PTO with us because I think he's going to help with our back end.

"When we talked about bringing him to camp ... one of the things that came up is we're going to have some young players on defence this year and he can help with their development. He's a veteran player, he plays with passion, he plays hard and we think he's going to be a good fit with our group."

Hamonic averaged 21:12 of ice time last season with the Calgary Flames, usually in matchup minutes, but was not re-signed after opting out of the Flames' summer playoff bubble due to health concerns for his two young children.

Despite an impressive career and robust play in a defensive role, he became one of many NHL free agents squeezed by the coronavirus-caused recession within the league.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Why Benning is excited what Green can do with Canucks long term

The Canucks' six-man defence looks like this: Quinn Hughes-Schmidt; Alex Edler-Tyler Myers; Olli Juolevi-Hamonic.

Juolevi, the 22-year-old who made his NHL debut during the Canucks' surprising playoff run, is one of the defencemen Benning hopes Hamonic will help mentor.

The Canucks get really young at the depth positions, where veteran Jordie Benn will be pushed by rookies Jalen Chatfield, Jack Rathbone and Brogan Rafferty.

"I think what (Hamonic) can provide is a lot of things that you need to win," Green said. "Blocking shots, end of the game ... penalty kill, hard defensive minutes that you need to win. It's not always offence that wins; it's two-way and defensive hockey as well, and I think he can bring that to our group."

Hamonic, who is starting his seven-day NHL quarantine after flying to Vancouver from his Winnipeg-area home, isn't the only Canuck awaiting a new contract.

As they sat a socially-distanced six feet apart for Sunday's press conference, Benning and Green had yet to agree on a contract extension for the coach, who has overseen the development of the Canucks' young stars and the steady improvement of the rebuilt team.

There is no doubt Green has earned a new contract and raise – from an entry-level NHL deal reportedly worth \$1 million annually to something in the coaching mid-range of about \$3 million – but like Hamonic, he is squeezed by the current financial situation.

Benning says Canucks intend to sign Green to a contract extension

Benning reiterated Sunday his intention to re-sign his head coach when there is more clarity about the NHL's financial future, but having Green enter the season on an expiring contract – in a rabid Canadian market – is hardly ideal. Just wait until the Canucks lose consecutive games.

"It's an exciting time to be a Canuck right now," Green said. "I haven't hidden that I want to be here long term. I think we're just starting to scratch the surface of what we are as a team and where we're going. With our conversations with Jim, I'm fine where we are right now and hopefully we can work things out and I can be here for awhile. It is no secret I love coaching here and I want to win here."

Green is excited about the season, too, and the unprecedented North Division.

"I know there's been a lot of uncertainty in everyone's lives, but you know hockey brings back a little bit of normal for a lot of people," Green said. "We're kind of in uncharted waters here in an all-Canadian division. Everyone knows the passion for hockey in Canada. It's going to be a very exciting season for players, us coaches, fans. But not just fans of the Canucks, but the fans of hockey throughout Canada. We probably won't see this again and it's going to be exciting. It's going to be an amazing year, really."

Notes: With Ferland still home in Manitoba, Benning said he was unaware of any medical issues involving players at camp... Besides Hamonic, Eastern European prospect Lukas Jasek and junior goalie Arturs Silovs still face quarantine restrictions... Benning said he doesn't expect to reassign players to the taxi-squad or minor-league Utica Comets until the Canucks name their 23-man roster for the Jan. 13 season-opener in Edmonton.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.04.2021

1197900 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs quietly confident about ability to win all-Canadian division

Chris Johnston

January 3, 2021, 9:47 PM

TORONTO — The first day of an NHL training camp is reserved for promotional photos and medicals. It also comes with an outsized amount of media attention, even in this age of safely-distanced Zoom availabilities, so when you work for a team like the Toronto Maple Leafs it's important not to say anything you might later regret.

By that measure, it was a good afternoon behind the microphone for general manager Kyle Dubas.

"A great hypothetical," Dubas said Sunday, when asked if this can be considered a successful season for his Leafs without some form of playoff success.

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

The third-year GM was in good spirits during a 20-minute session with reporters. He certainly wasn't evasive or sneaky while fielding a couple variations of the question about how success should be measured in 2021. He simply refused to put any words around what we all kind of know intuitively about this iteration of his team.

The Leafs intend to conquer the North, first in the regular season and later in the divisional playoff rounds. They fancy themselves as legitimate players for the Stanley Cup and they know they haven't won a playoff round since before Nicholas Robertson strapped on skates for the first time.

That's why the less-is-more approach was smart for Dubas.

We're all going to say it regardless, so why add any more kindling to the pile just as the match is being struck?

The closest Dubas came to disclosing specific expectations was pointing out that the team hadn't finished any better than a tie for sixth overall in the NHL standings in recent years. He spoke of how former divisional foes in Tampa and Boston were consistently great regular-season teams before going on long playoff marches.

He didn't explicitly connect every dot but it sure sounded like he was setting the bar: Dominate the regular season, secure home-ice advantage and the long-anticipated next step will follow.

"A lot of people will point to our playoff failures as a source of discontent and worry going into the year, but as I explained to the players [on Saturday] — and [coach] Sheldon [Keefe] and I have talked about really from the end of the season — the major thing that we feel has affected us as we've gone through the season has been we've not set ourselves up as best as possible for the playoffs," said Dubas. "In going back to '16-'17 all the way through last year, we've had stretches which have hindered our ability to position ourselves as strongly as possible going into the playoffs. What we're focused on right now in Day 1 of camp is building the foundation that's going to serve us in the regular season and then focusing on each and every day in the regular season as a way to set ourselves up as best as possible for the playoffs."

Signs of growth, he suggested, can be measured by how quickly they shake off a bout of poor play. Merely being good won't be viewed as good enough.

The Leafs are favoured to win the North Division by both bookies and advanced statistical models alike, and this once-in-a-lifetime COVID-19 realignment guarantees the last Canadian team standing a spot in the conference finals.



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In that sense, this seems like a golden opportunity after sharing a division with the Lightning and Bruins — teams that have won the first and third highest number of total games, respectively, across the last four regular seasons.

But this is sports and the models don't always hold true.

Not every free-agent signing fits as expected, which is just as applicable for T.J. Brodie and Joe Thornton in Toronto as it is for Jacob Markstrom and Christopher Tanev in Calgary and Tyler Toffoli and Corey Perry in Montreal.

Plus, the gap between the Leafs and the other Canadian teams wasn't evident at all when the season was paused last March. Edmonton actually enjoyed a slightly better winning percentage at that moment — .585-.579 — while Vancouver (.565), Calgary (.564) and Winnipeg (.563) followed closely behind.

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

Then Montreal knocked off Pittsburgh inside the summer return-to-play bubble and had a busy off-season. Even Ottawa, also-rans the last two years, have reason for hope with a burgeoning group of prospects and some veterans brought in to calm the waters around them.

"As difficult I think as the circumstances and the world we're living in right now [are] — playing without fans and a lot of tough times that a lot of people are going through — I think this is such a unique opportunity for something that can be really special," said Leafs captain John Tavares.

"I think the Canadian Division is probably the most exciting just because of all the fans and the pride that comes with playing in each team's individual city," added Auston Matthews. "It should make for some good hockey."

Someone has to break through.

Vancouver reached Game 7 of the second round in August, Calgary added Markstrom to a group that's won more games than any Canadian outfit the last two seasons, Edmonton has two Hart Trophy winners aged 25-and-under on its roster, Winnipeg played in the Western Conference Final in 2018 ... but it is Toronto being labelled the alpha dog.

With the strongest blue-line they've built in the Matthews/Marner Era, and depth to spare at every position, they're feeling quietly confident heading into a 56-game sprint of a season. They just didn't want to put any quotes on the bulletin board before the first official practice had even been held.

"I think you've got seven teams that are probably all looking at it the same way," said Dubas.

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TSN.CA / Revenge-minded Levi leads Canada into Russia showdown

By Mark Masters

What is Devon Levi feeling on the eve of Canada's semifinal showdown with Russia?

"Goosebumps," the goalie said with a smile. "Can't wait. I can't wait to play."

Levi, a freshman at Northeastern University, earned an invite to Canada's World Junior camp thanks to a stellar performance at the 2019 World Junior A Challenge in Dawson Creek, B.C. Levi was named tournament

MVP as Canada East fell to Russia in double overtime of the championship game. Shakhir Mukhamadullin, who's also at the World Juniors, scored the winner on the power play.

"It was heartbreaking," said Levi, who made 39 saves in the final. "I still remember exactly how I felt and hopefully we can do something about it tomorrow ... I'm just looking forward to getting a second chance."

Levi owns the best save percentage at the World Juniors (.967) and shut out the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals. Afterwards head coach Andre Tourigny admitted he wasn't sure Levi had this type of performance in him.

"I won't say I knew him and had no doubt," Canada's head coach told TSN's Ryan Rishaug. "We've liked him since the beginning. Since he was with us, we love what he brings. We love his energy. We love his focus. We love his attention to detail. We love everything about him, but if I'm telling you, 'Yeah, I knew before,' that is not true."

Canada's staff wasn't sure Levi's play would translate from Junior A to the World Juniors, but the Florida Panthers seventh-round pick has silenced all the questions about the team's goaltending situation.

On Monday, Levi will see Yaroslav Askarov, the 11th overall pick in October's NHL Draft, at the other end of the ice and it says a lot about his ascent that Russian head coach Igor Larionov was unwilling to say his team had an edge in net.

"Both teams are equal and there are no advantages," Larionov insisted. "We don't underestimate anybody."

Levi made 23 saves when Canada shut out the Russians 1-0 in a pre-tournament game on Dec. 23. Askarov stopped all 22 shots he faced in two periods of work that night.

Askarov, who has a .918 save percentage in four games in Edmonton, was at the World Juniors last year, but lost the starting job to Amir Miftakhov and didn't see the ice in either game against Canada. Levi, meanwhile, re-watched the entire gold-medal game between Canada and Russia as part of his preparation for camp.

"I took a lot of things from it," he said. "They're high-intensity games and there are a lot of momentum changes and I'm just ready for highs and lows throughout the game. I'm just excited."

Levi paid special attention to how Joel Hofer kept Canada in the game even as they trailed throughout much of the tension-filled encounter.

"He was rock solid," Levi observed. "He did a real good job of managing his emotions. The team went down and he did a good job of shutting the door and giving them a chance to get back in."

'Goosebumps, can't wait': Levi hyped up for clash with Russia

Canadian netminder Devon Levi discusses the excitement of taking part in the Canada/Russia rivalry as he gets set to face the Russians in the semifinals.

Only three Russian players — captain Vasilii Podkolzin, Maxim Groshev and Askarov — are back from last year's team, but the sting from the defeat was felt throughout the country's hockey community.

"They're going to be coming out for revenge," noted Connor McMichael, one of six returning players on Canada's roster. "We're going to be up for the task."

Is last year's loss on the minds of the Russians?

"No doubt about it," said Larionov. "No doubt."

McMichael says Tourigny is a similar coach to Dale Hunter, who ran Canada's bench last year in Ostrava, Czech Republic. But Larionov has implemented a much different style than his predecessor Valeri Bragin.

"It's day and night," said Tourigny. "It's totally different. Different style, different philosophy, different objective in their game. They like to possess the puck. They regroup a lot. They have a good stretch on their



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breakouts. They got a few breakaways out of it. They still are really stingy defensively, still defend really well. They're strong on puck. They're fast. They're a good team."

"My coaching philosophy is to bring Russia hockey back to the top," said Larionov, "and make the players play the game, not work the game. It's about collective play and about moving the puck quick. That's the game I want them to enjoy. That's the game they have to play as little kids when they have no pressure and just go out and have fun."

So, what are the keys for Canada against Larionov's system?

"Probably the biggest difference is their patience with the puck," said defenceman Jamie Drysdale, who scored the only goal in the pre-tournament game. "So, we'll need to adapt to that and make sure we have a really good forecheck."

Drysdale admitted it can be tricky staying on your toes as a defenceman when the Russians are constantly regrouping with the puck.

"It's definitely a challenge to get your gaps right," said the Anaheim Ducks first rounder. "We need to make sure we're sharp with that and making sure we always have our feet moving when we gap up so we never get caught flat-footed. I think that happened to us a couple times in the exhibition game and we have to sharpen up on that."

Russia head coach Igor Larionov spoke to TSN's Mark Masters about what's at stake for Monday's semifinal match against Canada, what the keys to the game will be and admitted that his players undoubtedly have last year's loss on their minds.

Injured centre Alex Newhook skated for about 50 minutes on Sunday as he continues to nurse an upper-body injury. The Boston College product often conferred with Dr. Barry Wiens, the team physician, as he tried out some shots and jumped into the glass a couple times to test his shoulder.

Newhook continues to be listed as day-to-day and his status for the semifinal against Russia is still up in the air, Tourigny said.

Larionov confirmed that Yegor Chinakhov is good to go for Team Russia after missing the last two games with a lower-body injury.

Heading into its semifinal clash against Russia, the biggest question mark for Canada is the health status of Alex Newhook. James Duthie and Bob McKenzie discuss how Canada deals with his potential return and how the Canadians will try and subdue the potent Russian attack.

With Canada the top seed, Tourigny will have last change on Monday and will likely look to get the McMichael line out against Russia's top trio of Podkolzin, Rodion Amirov and Marat Khushnutdinov.

After the win on Saturday night, Tourigny was asked whether potting an empty-net goal may help McMichael get back to his high-scoring ways. The London Knights sniper had seven shots and hit three posts against the Finns on New Year's Eve. But Canada's coach immediately shifted the conversation and made it clear McMichael's value goes well beyond his offensive contributions.

"Mikes is an underrated player defensively," said Tourigny. "He sits in the weeds and reads the play well and he has a good stick and he cuts plays [off] and does a lot of good things."

Perhaps that explains why Tourigny has opted to keep McMichael in the middle and shift Dylan Cozens, another natural centre, to right wing on Canada's top line. McMichael made a nice pass to spring Cozens for the opening goal on Saturday. Tourigny also noted that the Washington Capitals first rounder was really reliable on face-offs against the Czechs.

"I've evolved in a large way in that aspect," McMichael said of his two-way game. "Just being with the Caps last summer and being around those guys [in the bubble] and working with their development team taught me a lot. Watching guys like [Nicklas] Backstrom and how they approach the defensive side, you try and pick out things."

In a conversation with TSN before the World Juniors, McMichael described what he sees when he watches Backstrom.

"Just how smart he is, his hockey sense. He's not the biggest guy, but he's able to get around just using his hockey sense and his stick and that's kind of the game I play. I'm not the biggest guy, but I feel like I have great hockey sense and a good stick so I'm trying to pick a lot of things from his game. He's just so responsible and all the coaches trust him, so that's kind of the game I'm leaning towards and he's a great role model."

How will Canada's lines look against Russia's balanced firepower?

Canada will renew acquaintances with their foes from Russia who will likely provide the biggest challenge yet for the Canadians at the World Juniors. How will the semifinal clash play out? James Duthie and Bob McKenzie discuss what kind of team the Russians will face on Monday and more.

With Canada struggling to pull away from a stubborn Czech team on Saturday night, Tourigny juggled his lines in the third period most notably promoting Peyton Krebs to the top unit with McMichael and Cozens.

"Krebsie is a driver on his own line, but yesterday I felt we could give a shot to our team to have a top line with Krebise and Cuzzy and Mikes so I went with that," Tourigny explained. "I don't know how many minutes they played, but they played a lot in the third period. With the game on the line, I felt that was the right move."

"He's an Energizer Bunny," said McMichael of the 5-foot-11 Krebs. "He's small, fast and really skilled. I love playing with him and if we're playing together tomorrow I'd be really happy."

Tourigny may revert to a more balanced approach at least to start the game against Russia.

"To have success as a team we need four lines with a lot of intensity," the coach said, "but when the chips were down for 20 minutes, I felt like we needed a line who I could rely on and those were the three."

Krebs called the Czech game the most physical one Canada has played so far and that style certainly seemed to suit the Vegas first rounder.

"I've liked the game of Krebise a lot throughout the tournament," said Tourigny. "He brings a lot of energy. His tracking is phenomenal. He creates a lot of possession down low. He makes a lot of plays."

Krebs lived with Mark Stone in Vegas at the start of last season as he rehabbed an Achilles injury and the pair have been in touch throughout the World Juniors.

"We've texted pretty much every game and he's giving me the odd tip here and there," said Krebs, who was with the Golden Knights inside the bubble this summer. "I love chatting with him and he's been great for me. Definitely was a little intimidated going into Vegas with all those studs, but he made the transition a lot easier."

The most notable message from Stone?

"He tells me to, 'Just have fun,' and also to remember this will be the last time I ever do this. He said, 'It's shorter than you think,' and 'Come to the rink with a smile on your face every day.'"

Stone led Canada in scoring and won a bronze medal at the 2012 World Juniors, which was the last time the event was held in Alberta. That was also the last year Canada played Russia in the semifinals with the home side falling 6-5 in a wild game.

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TSN.CA / Emphasis now on regular season success for Leafs

By Kristen Shilton



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The Maple Leafs went through team medical examinations during the first day of training camp at Ford Performance Centre.

Before Maple Leafs' head coach Sheldon Keefe wrapped up his first media availability of training camp on Sunday, he couldn't resist dropping a little bombshell about line combinations. For Toronto's first on-ice sessions Monday, Keefe revealed that veteran Joe Thornton would be at left wing on a line with Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner.

"I actually didn't see the [lineup] sheet at first," recalled Marner on a subsequent Zoom call with reporters Sunday. "It was two or three days ago, and I remember I was sitting beside [Zach] Hyman on the ice, and we have the same jerseys on and I remember we were doing a line drill, so I just literally got up, grabbed Hyman and was like, 'I'm assuming it's us right?' and he goes 'no, you're playing with Jumbo.' And I was like, 'okay.' So at first, I didn't know if it was just for practice or what was going on there, and I talked to Sheldon later that day and he said that was the line."

If initially thrown off by the decision, Marner warmed quickly to the thought of skating alongside Toronto's oldest (at 41 years old) player, who started his NHL career the same year Marner and Matthews were born (1997).

"I'm excited about it. I mean, I've watched him for a long time," Marner said. "What he does with the puck, how he controls the puck in the o-zone, it's very impressive to watch. It's going to be fun to play with a very talented playmaker and for me, I think it's just [about] trying to find holes in the middle of the ice, that I can get into open spots, and be more of a shooter and more of a threat."

Both Marner and Matthews have felt some early chemistry brewing with Thornton over their first few days of practice, in part because of how their varied skill sets can complement each other. Thornton had stayed busy making 12 appearances with Davos HC in the Swiss League prior to joining the Leafs last month, and Matthews said he seemed as sharp as ever.

"He's a big frame, so I think it's nice to know whenever we're in trouble that we've got an outlet, because he hangs around the net," Matthews explained. "He's in front of it, behind it, and just having that outlet when he's so big and strong and can protect the puck so well, it [offers] those little give-and-gos and [you] just trying to get open for him. You know he's got great vision, even with guys draped all over him. It's just finding that chemistry throughout camp and building on it every day."

"The chemistry is getting better every day," Marner added.

Other line combinations Keefe will be running off the top include free agent signee Jimmy Vesey with John Tavares and William Nylander, Ilya Mikheyev with Alex Kerfoot and Hyman and Jason Spezza between Alex Barabanov and Wayne Simmonds on the fourth line.

The Leafs have had little recent success in the postseason, between three consecutive first-round exits from 2017-19 and then failing to advance past the qualifying round in last summer's tournament. But that doesn't mean the team's focus is on preparing for a playoff push this year; in reality, their biggest concern is the 56 games that will come before.

Because it's that span which will show general manager Kyle Dubas just how much his team has - or has not - learned from past disappointments.

"How we go through the regular season, that'll be the first sign of growth," Dubas said. "We talked about growth at the end of last season, talked about it during the offseason, during the free agent and draft period. I think a lot of teams go through these trials and tribulations or crucibles or whatever you want to call them on their way to getting to where they all want to go. And we shared some of those habits internally here and talked about that. For us, with regards to what would show growth, that would be how we're able to go through the regular season and do we go through it with the mindset of being at our best every day, can we quickly

put a stop to any bouts of poor form and gather ourselves and roll ahead?"

Dubas acknowledged that people want a "definitive answer" from him on what would qualify as a successful season for the Leafs this year, but it's not as simple as just stating a goal outright. In Dubas' mind, Toronto will be defined by its daily habits, not a final outcome.

"A lot of people will point to our playoff failures as a source of discontent and worry going into the year," Dubas said. "But the major thing that we feel has affected us as we've gone through the season has been that we've not set ourselves up as best as possible for the playoffs. We've had stretches which have hindered our ability to position ourselves as strongly as possible going in. So in order for us to give ourselves the best chance at success there, we have to focus on the day-to-day and building the mindset and habits that are going to serve us when we get there. I'm certain in the work that Sheldon and the staff have done to build out the [training] camp and the early portion of the season, that if we come in and execute that, it will serve as our foundation as we go through the year."

Morgan Rielly has heard Dubas' message loud and clear, and can see where the Leafs' past stumbles have affected playoff performance.

"I think a little bit of how we've ended the past couple years, we needed to be a bit more consistent," he said. "If you look back at the previous years, and how we've played down the stretch and how we've prepared for playoffs, there's been a theme there and I think that this is an opportunity for us to change that. It's important that we're able to change old habits, and be in a spot at the end of the year that we're proud of and we're playing well and we are able to carry that momentum forward. I think that this year is just an opportunity to change the narrative and play with confidence down the stretch."

By the time Toronto takes the ice for its first camp sessions on Monday, players should be well-versed in areas where Keefe expects them to excel over the 10-day intensive.

"The specific focuses for us are going to be on competitiveness, physicality and structure," he said. "Our focus is going to be on building habits and setting the standards that are going to be necessary for us to have success. I could really simply define that as our ability to make it more difficult to get to our net, get in people's way and make it a tough pathway to get access to our zone and our net, and then to fight for space and get good ice to get clear access to the opponent's end. That's where the competitiveness comes in. And in terms of our consistency, there's a whole other area for us [to work on] and that standard is going to be set with our habits from day one in training camp."

Keefe hasn't shied away from challenging his team - particularly its core - to take more responsibility and ownership for their respective defensive games. According to the club's data, there's a lot to feel positively about when players execute the right way.

"The way we've approached [improvement] here has been to just call it out. We've been very direct with it," Keefe said. "We showed [players] the fact that we're capable of it, and there's numerous examples, in fact there's more examples of us being good in that regard than there are where we're not good in that regard. We just need to be able to do it consistently and that's our focus as a team. [We have to] build that level of accountability from the coaching staff to the players and then ultimately from player to player. That's when we know we'll really have something, is when the players themselves are pushing and policing that. We've got great skill, we're capable of great things with the puck, but we need to round out and complete our game in all regards to give us a best chance at success."

In a normal season, Keefe would have several exhibition games in which to evaluate the many players Toronto had invited to training camp as well. But this year, the Leafs have just 40 bodies in total (23 forwards, 13 defencemen and four goalies) and zero pre-season contests, making each day the team spends in camp all the more crucial to Keefe's decision-making process.



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"It certainly makes it more difficult," he admitted of not having an exhibition slate. "You don't have [that] to work through and we're prioritizing practice and conditioning in our camps and we're not even going to scrimmage as much as we might in other camps. So, instead we're settling into two very distinct groups right from the start to try to maximize the amount of time we have and get the bulk of our team [together]. And because of that, it's going to be more difficult to see players competing in that regard. So we're trusting what we know about them."

The Leafs will get to fill out a four to six player taxi squad though, keeping close a group of skaters who can step in if necessary. In a way, Keefe hopes that will cultivate a constant aura of competitiveness.

"The evaluation won't end once camp breaks, it's going to be ongoing," he said. "You expect everybody, whether they are in the opening lineup or no, to continue to work and push, be ready to take advantage of the opportunity. We see that [taxi squad] as a benefit to our team and it will help the fact that we don't have as long to make the necessary decisions [and allow] for things to play out and having another group of players to call on and have them right there and to see them every day will help us make sure we make the right decisions."

The Leafs' entire 56-game regular season will be played against six other Canada-based NHL teams this year, and Keefe already sees one major advantage to that level of familiarity.

"Probably most importantly what it does is it frees up so much more time to just focus on your own team," he said. "And I think that's really where we're at as a group is to just make sure that our game is right. When you're focusing more on your games head-to-head with your opponents rather than looking at them playing into others and all those sorts of things, [it's positive]. I'm excited about that, because that allows you to just zero in on a very small number of opponents and get to know them very well."

The key, said Rielly, will be to adjust as quickly to the division's other teams as they will be adjusting to the Leafs.

"I think that teams are going to adapt over the course of a season, and they're going to learn about each other, they're going to change their game plan, they're going to do what they can to be successful," he said. "So, if you're doing one thing and you're winning most games against any certain team, they're going to change it up and they're going to try to change their game plan and do something different to have success. I don't think you can get complacent. Just because you win on Tuesday that doesn't mean Wednesday is going to be the same outcome. So I think it's a matter of being adaptable."

And with a shortened schedule on the horizon, there's little room for error on a given night either.

"I think the rivalries and the competition will be great but I think the thing that will make this division great is how close the teams are," Dubas said. "It will really force you to get dialled in on each and every game because they're all vitally important with regards to the final standings and because it's only 56 games. We have to be ready to go right from the start."

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TSN.CA / Ten takeaways from Day 1 of Canucks camp

By Jeff Paterson

VANCOUVER -- The Vancouver Canucks opened their long-awaited, much-anticipated 2021 training camp with general manager Jim Benning and head coach Travis Green addressing the media. The following are 10 key points that jumped out from the virtual session on Sunday morning.

Benning confirmed the addition of veteran defenceman Travis Hamonic to the camp roster on a professional tryout. The 30-year-old right-shot blueliner opted out of the summer's Return to Play and has not appeared in an NHL game since suffering an upper-body injury against the Canucks at Rogers Arena on Feb. 8. So it will be 11 months between game action for the veteran who won't be able to join the on-ice sessions at camp for another week.

"Once we get going here it seems like we're going to be playing every second night -- 56 games in 116 days," Benning explained. "With the travel, we just thought he's an experienced player and can come in and help us so we got him signed to a PTO. He's flying in today. He'll do his quarantine and then he'll join us for camp and we'll make a decision on him after camp. I'm excited he chose to come in and sign a PTO with us because I think he's going to help with our back-end and help develop our young players."

While Hamonic is not officially under contract to the Canucks -- yet -- it certainly sounded like Green has a slot in his top six earmarked for him. Green sounded well past the usual 'let's have a look at him and see how he fits'. No, the coach already has Hamonic penciled in for late-game situations to help the hockey club secure victories.

"Just what he can provide is a lot of things that you need to win," Green said. "Blocked shots, end of the game, penalty kill, hard defensive minutes that you need to win ultimately. It's not always offence that wins, it's two-way and defensive hockey as well and I think he can bring that to our group."

While it didn't come as a surprise, Benning confirmed that rugged winger Micheal Ferland will not participate in training camp. Last summer, after a lengthy layoff, Ferland was able to attend camp and ultimately return to the line-up in the post-season. But after suffering a season-ending concussion in the Edmonton bubble, clearly something has changed that isn't allowing Ferland to compete in this camp.

"He's not going to be able to join us here to start the season," Benning said. "He still has concussion symptoms from what happened in the bubble last year. So he'll continue to rehab and we just continue to hope that he gets feeling better and we'll go from there."

It's pretty clear that both Benning and Green want the coach to remain behind the bench. But it's also evident that Green will start training camp without the security of a contract extension. The GM confirmed that COVID's impact on the business of hockey is one of the main reasons for the hold-up in getting Green signed, sealed and delivered.

"We want to take a look at the financial landscape of the whole business as we keep moving forward," Benning said. "But our intention is to sign Travis to an extension here so that he's a part of our group moving forward."

For his part, Green re-iterated what he has said since the Canucks were eliminated from the playoffs last September -- he believes he is the right man for the job and wants to be here long term.

"Jim and I have had good conversations," he said. "I haven't hidden the fact that it's an exciting time to be a Canuck right now. Whether you're a fan, a player, someone that works in the organization, it really is. And I'm part of that. I'm excited as well. I haven't hidden the fact that I want to be here long term. We're just starting to scratch the surface of what we are as a team and where we're going. With my conversations with Jim, I'm fine with where we're at right now and hopefully we can work things out and I can be here for a while. But starting today, I'm just worried about today and worried about our team and getting them prepared for Game 1. It's no secret I love coaching here and I want to win here."



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As for training camp, the Canucks hit the ice in two groups on Monday at Rogers Arena. The head coach has made a habit of testing his players' fitness on the first day of past camps. Expect that to be the case again after four months off.

"I anticipate camp will be competitive," Green said. "We're going to try to play a lot of games. We'll probably have four days of game-like situations, a couple of full game days and some hard practices to get the conditioning level to where it needs to be. I do feel like our group comes in great shape, but there is still hockey shape and pushing yourselves out of your comfort zone that they're going to need to get to. And they understand that and that's one good thing about our group is they embrace it and they know that we do it for their betterment and the team's betterment."

One of the battles to watch closely at camp will be between the pipes where Thatcher Demko will try to stake his claim to the starter's job while veteran Braden Holtby will look to make an immediate impact on his new coach and team after signing as a free agent in the off-season. The coach wasn't ready to tip his hand Sunday as to who has the inside track to be the Game 1 starter.

"To have two guys like that to start training camp, it's exciting for us from a goaltending standpoint," Green said. "I'm definitely not going to sit here and say that I already know who's going to play how many games or anything like that. Let's see where they're at on the ice. Obviously we have a young goalie that we hope is still improving and played tremendously in the playoffs. And we've got a guy that's already done a lot in the league and still has a lot of juice left in him. So we're in a good spot."

It wouldn't be a Canucks training camp without a question about Jake Virtanen. Green was asked about his top six forward group and where the 24-year-old Abbotsford native fits into the equation heading into the first on-ice session. Because of conditioning issues, Virtanen was relegated to an AHL group on Day 1 of the team's last full training camp in September 2019. He responded with a career-high 18-goal season.

"If you go back to last year, we were in the same boat at the beginning of the year," Green recalled. "It's no different now. We'll have to figure that out as we go. As far as Jake, I've been with Jake a long time. He knows what's expected of him. I think progression is also something we want to see out of Jake. It's not just him, it's a lot of our young players. We have high expectations within our group and part of those expectations are coming back better hockey players and he'd be on that list. We still think we haven't seen his best yet."

Because of COVID and the resulting border restrictions, the Canucks find themselves in an All-Canadian division, something Green couldn't hide his excitement about.

"Everyone knows the passion of hockey in Canada," he said. "It's going to be a very exciting season for players, coaches but also fans. And not just fans of the Canucks, but fans of hockey throughout Canada. You probably won't see this again and it's going to be exciting and it's going to be an amazing year really."

Like many British Columbians, Benning said he finds himself in front of the television every time BC's Chief Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry addresses the province. The Canucks have worked hard with Dr. Henry to ensure the team is meeting all protocols to ensure the health and safety of the entire organization. Benning emphasized that players have been briefed on their responsibilities to follow the health orders in order to allow them to play this season.

"It's going to be strict, but I have a lot of confidence that our players are going to be disciplined to follow all the rules that they need to follow because they want to play," he said. "This is what they do. It's the time of year they're playing hockey and I know they're anxious to get back playing and they know what's at stake. I've been following the other leagues. I understand the hiccups the other leagues have had. It could happen to us in hockey, but I'm hoping that we have a good run here and

we can play the games because it should be fun for our fans and fans across Canada."

The first group of Canucks hits the ice at 10 a.m. Monday. The team is scheduled to have eight days of camp in Vancouver before traveling to Edmonton on Jan. 12 and opening the season against the Oilers at Rogers Place on Jan. 13 and 14.

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