



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes' Andrei Svechnikov gets 8 chances to beat his older brother this season

By Chip Alexander

Andrei Svechnikov is a dreamer.

The Carolina Hurricanes forward, in fact, says he has dreamed often about lining up against his older brother, Evgeny Svechnikov, in an NHL game. And that might come true this unusual NHL season.

Svechnikov will be entering this third year with the Hurricanes and has been described in many ways: powerful, skilled, intense and workaholic as well as cheerful, funny and charismatic. Many believe he is on the verge of NHL stardom at age 20.

"He's going to keep getting better and better," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said on a Tuesday media call. "He came in as a kid and is still a young man but his willingness to get better is why he's going to continue to get better."

It has been a much slower go for Svechnikov's brother. Like Andrei, Evgeny, 24, is a former first-round draft pick. Unlike Andrei, the forward has played only 20 games for the Red Wings, his development stalled by an ACL tear in October 2018 that required reconstruction surgery on his right knee.

BROTHER VS. BROTHER

The newly formed NHL has brought the Canes and Red Wings into the same, now newly named division for 2020-21 -- the "Discover Central Division." The NHL announced Tuesday that each of the four divisions would have a naming sponsor, also bringing about the Honda West, MassMutual East and Scotia North.

The Canes and Red Wings will meet eight times in the 56-game regular season, starting with the Jan. 14 opener. That's eight chances for Andrei and Evgeny, if he's on the Wings roster, to face each other -- Svechnikov injured an arm in a Wings scrimmage Tuesday.

"Every day I start going to sleep I start thinking about that," Andrei said on the media call. "It's going to be so much fun. It's always been our little dream to play against each other and

it's going to be so much fun. If I'm on a shift against him I'll try to hit him or something. We'll see."

The Canes-Wings games will also mean Staal vs Staal as the Canes' Jordan Staal renews his NHL rivalry with defenseman Marc Staal, who was traded by the New York Rangers to Detroit. Nothing new there for the Staal brothers.

But Svechnikov vs Svechnikov would be a first. The two, who both wear No. 37, have not gone up against each other at any point in their hockey careers, Andrei said.

ANDREI SVECHNIKOV IS MORE COMFORTABLE IN THE NHL NOW

Svechnikov could become a point-per-game player, if not better, this season for the Canes. The ability is there. He had 61 points in 68 games last season, scoring 24 goals, before the NHL regular season was suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Svechnikov established himself on the power play last season, scoring six times and adding 14 assists. As a rookie in 2018-19, he did not score on the power play, missing 18 shots. With Brind'Amour using him more last season, he had 54 shots.

It was feared Svechnikov might have been severely injured in the 2020 NHL playoffs against the Boston Bruins, with thoughts of an Evgeny-type knee injury initially flashing through some minds after he tangled up with Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara and fell backward. But it was an ankle sprain, a disaster of an injury dodged.

Svechnikov said he's more comfortable, more confident after two years in the NHL. Case in point: the two lacrosse goals last season. At 6-2 and 195 pounds, he said he's stronger. A next step for him, Svechnikov said, would be in becoming more of a team leader.

"All his skills are there and now you add the strength and to me the confidence he's gained," Brind'Amour said. "It will continue to grow."



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THE ATHLETIC

LeBrun: 5 high-profile pending UFAs to watch during an uncertain 2021 season

By Pierre LeBrun

A shortened season, a pandemic still flexing, a flat cap still in place.

These remain uncertain times in the NHL and hardly ideal if you're a pending unrestricted free agent this summer.

With that in mind, let's examine a handful of players whose contracts expire July 28 and what's at stake for them this season.

Taylor Hall, 29, Buffalo Sabres

The star winger just lived the pandemic-affected UFA market this past fall, shocking the hockey world by signing a one-year, \$8-million deal with the Sabres. Nobody saw that coming. Now we'll see if that bet pays off. Playing an entire season on Jack Eichel's wing could be the perfect tonic for a Hart Trophy winner looking to put some shine back on his game. This summer he'll be hoping to find a long-term fit.

"Well, if it's any indication from the search for a team when we first went into free agency, even with the pandemic involved, and the tightening that happened, there were still teams motivated and trying to do something in order to sign him on a longer-term deal," Hall's agent Darren Ferris. "So I'm quite confident that that will return. I know he's excited, I think the rest has been an advantage for players like Taylor to heal and to get back on track. And he's got an elite centre to play with. It's going to be an interesting year. And I know he's not ruling out staying in Buffalo. He's mentioned that to me on numerous occasions. That's a very real likelihood."

Ferris is notorious for bringing his high-profile clients to market in their UFA years but in this particular case, if the Eichel-Hall chemistry develops into something special, and Hall finds his MVP form or close to it, and the fact that Buffalo isn't far from his offseason home, I could see the winger wanting to stay put if the Sabres really step up. Especially when you consider the pressure that's on the Sabres to put a winning team around Eichel.

From our Sabres beat writer John Vogl:

"As you'd expect, there's legitimate excitement in Sabreland about that top line. The playmaking of Eichel and Hall combined with the lethal shot of Victor Olofsson has Buffalo convinced it can match any trio in the NHL. If it works, there's definitely room to keep Hall. The Sabres have significant expiring contracts with Brandon Montour (\$3.85 million), Eric Staal (\$3.25 million), Jake McCabe (\$2.85 million) and Carter Hutton (\$2.75 million). While they'll also have to re-sign RFAs Rasmus Dahlin and Sam Reinhart, there's room to go beyond the \$8 million that Hall will make this year. Buffalo would certainly be willing to do it if the season goes as well as the camp introduction."

Vogl also points to this quote from Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger.

"Winning the MVP a couple of years ago has put him in an extremely confident position. He just oozes confidence when he's in the room or when he's on the ice. The leader in him has taken on a whole new level and meaning now, so those are add-ons. I've always loved the competitiveness of Taylor Hall, the hunger to want to win. Doing whatever the team needs to be successful was always in his DNA, but now he's adding a lot of bonuses, especially off the ice. I'm quite excited with what he's going to bring us."

Tuukka Rask, 34, Boston Bruins

Boy, time flies. I still remember reporting on Rask's eight-year, \$56-million extension signed in July 2013 like it was yesterday. Now he's UFA in just over six months. He's a fascinating one to watch, too, for all kinds of reasons. People wondered about his future in Boston after the controversy when he left the bubble last summer (it bothers me that anyone should question that). But the fact remains, the Bruins and his camp, led by agent Markus Lehto, didn't do an extension this fall. But given all the uncertainty in the world right now with the pandemic, it's not surprising the timing wasn't right for an extension.

"The extension may have been the last thing on everybody's mind here, going through this COVID situation, Return to Play, whether the NHL was going to play or not, you know, all that," Lehto said. "He's actually really happy in Boston. That's where home is. I've never heard him say that 'this is going to be my final year.' On the contrary. We all can see he's still one of the best goalies in the league. But I know there isn't any kind of a plan or strategy right now in terms of trying to get something done like next week. Who knows what the next week is going to bring, right? I think it's more like Tuukka wants to have another great season. Obviously, he wants to put the last one behind him, right?"

This is a really tough one. There were whispers around the league that Bruins GM Don Sweeney was taking calls on Rask in the offseason. The Bruins made a huge decision on Zdeno Chara. Is anyone convinced Patrice Bergeron will play past this season? Where does Rask fit in Boston's transition? I think the answer lies in how he plays this season and if the Bruins see the goalie who can help shepherd that transition for the next few years.

From our Bruins beat writer Fluto Shinzawa:

"Rask's 2020-21 performance will steer how he and the Bruins proceed for the years beyond. He turns 34 on March 10. At that age, injury and decline are expected companions.

"But Rask has yet to hit a wall. It's helped that the Bruins have managed his workload with assistance from Jaroslav Halak. It could very well be that Rask, arguably the second-best goalie after Connor Hellebuyck last year, remains among the league's elite.

"If so, it would serve player and organization well to pursue an extension (perhaps two seasons) of their relationship. Rask



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likes it in Boston. His three daughters were born in the city. For Rask, the likeliest outcome is re-signing with the Bruins or retiring. He does not seem interested in playing for another team.

“The Bruins, meanwhile, need an ace. Like Rask, Halak is also unrestricted after this season. Dan Vladar, their 2015 third-rounder, has yet to make a regular-season NHL appearance. Jeremy Swayman, the top NCAA goalie last year, hasn’t made a pro appearance.

“The guess here: Rask plays well and the relationship continues.”

Dougie Hamilton, 27, Carolina Hurricanes

You hate seeing any player suffer a serious injury but man I would have loved to see Hamilton finish off what was shaping up to be a career year before his season got derailed last year.

His six-year, \$34.5-million contract expires July 28 and he’s due for a raise on that \$5.75-million AAV, even in the pandemic NHL economy.

My guess is his camp, led by J.P. Barry, sees the conversation starting with Alex Pietrangolo’s new \$8.8-million AAV just signed in Vegas and working (down) from there.

But I would also guess the Canes would counter by starting with Torey Krug’s \$6.5-million AAV just signed in St. Louis and going from there.

Both sides have already connected.

“I’ve had some preliminary discussions with Don (Waddell),” Barry said. “Dougie wants to stay and extend with Carolina. We will re-engage soon after the season starts again.”

While owner Tom Dundon is always a wild-card in these negotiations, I believe this will eventually get done.

From our Hurricanes beat writer Sara Civian:

“Rod Brind’Amour confirmed those preliminary discussions Tuesday and harped on the importance of getting Hamilton re-signed. It’s pretty tough to disagree — he paces the Canes’ play on both sides of the ice and leads the way with their active D system. It might get a little fiesty at times, but I’m confident the Canes and Hamilton will come to an agreement at some point.”

Paul Stastny, 35, Winnipeg Jets

This was one of my favourite offseason transactions, the Jets bringing Stastny back to Winnipeg. Look out for assists galore opening the season on a line with a motivated Patrik Laine. Stastny’s three-year, \$19.5-million contract expires July 28, a deal he signed with Vegas in 2018.

I know there’s a lot of talk these days about some players wanting out of Winnipeg. Here’s a guy who, I believe, will want to stay. The question is, is there risk for the Jets to extend a player who just turned 35 last week? Well, there’s always risk, but this one is worth it in my mind.

“Paul loves the game and has geared his training to play a long time,” his agent, Matt Keator, said. “Winnipeg is a great fit for him and his focus is totally on winning there this season. They will be fun to watch.”

What I think it’s really going to come to this summer is what happens with Laine, and if they trade him, do they get a centre in return? And obviously how Stastny fares this season will also factor in. But on the surface, there’s a shot here for an extension come the offseason.

From our Jets beat writer Murat Ates:

“Stastny was a perfect fit in Winnipeg the first time he was here. Stastny has been practicing on a line with Laine and Kyle Connor, each of whom is a little older, wiser, and more dynamic than they were the last time Stastny was in town. And while he won’t be expected to score at his nearly point-per-game clip from the 2018 playoffs, Stastny will have every opportunity to rack up the apples.

“People will ask questions about his age and his drop off in points last season in Vegas. I’d argue he’s still a play-driving force, creating scoring chances for his teammates and spending most of his time in the offensive zone.

“But beyond this season? The person, player, and skillset would fit. It’s the dollars and term I’d be worried about if I were Winnipeg. The Jets will continue to have a need at centre and Stastny will probably be able to fill it — for now. Long term contracts for 35 year old players don’t tend to age well.

“At the right price point, a short term Stastny contract could give Winnipeg the perfect bridge to the Jets’ next generation of centres — notably prospects like Cole Perfetti and David Gustafsson.”

Alex Ovechkin, 35, Washington Capitals

We end it with the biggest name of all, but also the most unlikely to ever see the UFA market.

Can you imagine Ovechkin in another NHL uniform? I don’t think he can. He told reporters when camp opened this week that he wasn’t too concerned about his contract situation.

“We have plenty of time,” said Ovechkin. “I don’t think we’re on the rush. I think we understand everything that’s happening right now. Whatever is done is done. If it’s not done, we’re gonna talk and we’ll see.”

But his 13-year, \$124-million contract is indeed expiring this summer.

Ovechkin is representing himself in contract talks, just like his pal Nicklas Backstrom did last year. Backstrom, 33, signed a pre-COVID extension worth \$46 million over five years (\$9.2 million AAV). What does Ovechkin end up with?

To me the question has never been whether Ovechkin would re-sign with the Caps if he decided to continue his NHL career. It just whether he yearned to go home to Russia and finish his career in the KHL or not.

It sounds like he wants to continue on in the NHL.

There were discussions last summer between Ovechkin and Capitals GM Brian MacLellan, then they decided to shelve it for a while, and things are expected to pick up again sooner rather than later.

“We talked last year a few times, just general stuff like, ‘What do you want to do?’” MacLellan said. “We gave him what we were thinking. Just general discussions on how he wants to



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finish his career, basically. We tabled it because of all the stuff going on (uncertainty with the season) until the beginning of this year. We haven't talked yet, but we'll talk at some point here."

There's zero evidence of either side being concerned. Even with the flat cap, I see both these sides figuring this out.

From our Capitals beat writer Tarik El-Bashir:

"I'm going to cut to the chase: There's a 0.00-percent chance of Ovechkin signing with another team, in my opinion. He wants to be a Washington Capital for life, and management and ownership have voiced a similar desire. The big question is how much longer does he want to play? To me, it makes a lot of sense for Ovi to sign an extension that lines up with the one Backstrom inked a year ago. Backstrom's deal expires after the 2024-25 season."

There are plenty more pending UFAs in this boat, from Gabriel Landeskog to Frederik Andersen to Kyle Palmieri to Phil Danault to Ryan Nugent-Hopkins to Jordan Binnington to Brandon Saad to Ryan Getzlaf to David Krejci; no shortage of players in this situation.

If it were ever more true that the grass isn't always greener, it will be next offseason when I think the pandemic's economic impact will hit with full force under a flat cap again, although the Seattle expansion will help in loosening up some cap situations around the league.

Still, a major theme for me this year will be this: If you're a player that's happy with your current surroundings, take the security from your current team if offered. Because there won't necessarily be a bonanza waiting on the free agent market.



Canes embrace season of change

By Jared Fialko

Hockey in the time of a pandemic.

"I'm getting used to wearing these (holds up his facemask) everywhere around the rink, in the locker room and all the little protocols we have to go through," laughs Jaccob Slavin, Hurricanes all-star defenseman.

It's certainly different, even moreso than last summer's Canadian Cup bubble.

"Everything that you've preached and you want to see in your guys, now you can't do it," explains Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

"You want a team that hangs out with each other, is with each other all the time, to care for each other, but at the same time, they don't really want us too near to each other," nods Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal.

"That's a huge component of any team is coming together," Brind'Amour continues. "We've just got to use our time wisely, I guess, when we are together."

The radical overhaul not limited to just lounges and locker rooms. The NHL's late start slashes the season by 26 fewer games than normal, with regular season competition limited within the new geographically-designed division. The reshuffled division deck leaves Carolina with only one familiar foe in Columbus.

"I think we'll find some new hatred throughout these seven teams," Staal smiles.

When the puck drops next week in Detroit, it's for real. No exhibition tune-ups.

"I hated playing preseason games as a player," Brind'Amour says. "At the end of the day they don't count! But, I understand as a coach why you like them because they're really just a freebie to go out and figure stuff out."



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How the Canes Are Staying Safe, Adapting to New Protocols

Staal: 'We're going to do our best to stay out of that mess and take care of each other'

by Michael Smith

The first day of practice for the Carolina Hurricanes in training camp - skates carving into the ice at Wake Competition Center, pucks tickling the twine, bodies banging against the boards, whistles blowing, smiles abound - felt refreshingly normal in a time where the definition of such is increasingly relative.

The second day on the ice was much of the same. More skating. More drills. More hockey.

But it's also important to consider the backdrop against which this is all being staged, an ongoing global health crisis that is forcing the National Hockey League and its 31 clubs to reconsider the tried-and-true process of playing a regular season.

Just how different is this training camp so far?

Jacob Slavin held up his black Bauer face mask.

"It's different in the sense that we're getting used to wearing these around the rink and the locker room and all the little protocols we have to go through," he said. "But we've got to do what we've got to do to be able to play the season."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Hockey League paused its 2019-20 regular season on March 12, 2020. A little more than four months later, it orchestrated a return to the ice for 24 teams in an expanded postseason tournament. With secure zone bubble environments in Toronto and Edmonton, the NHL awarded the Stanley Cup with no trace of the novel coronavirus amongst 33,394 tests conducted July 26-Sept. 28.

That, in itself, was an immense undertaking, but its resounding success proved that sports are viable - and, most importantly, safe - in a controlled environment.

A bubble, though, is not logistically feasible for an entire league and an entire season.

So, now the NHL faces perhaps an even more herculean task of staging an 868-game regular season in 31 cities around North America while also maintaining the health and safety of all involved.

Things this year are decidedly different. They have to be.

"We have to take care of each other, take care of ourselves and make sure we're following the protocols the league has put in place in our home cities and on the road," Slavin said.

"We have to make sure everyone is staying safe when they can."

Some little tweaks are more familiar. Masks are commonplace. The coaches are even wearing masks on the ice during practice and will wear them on the bench during games. COVID-19 tests are daily for at least the first month of the season. Each player has his own water and Gatorade bottle on the bench. Common spaces in the locker room are sanitized regularly. Physical distancing is practiced as much as possible.

Some protocols are more drastic and unfamiliar. Road travel is going to be starkly different. In addition to playing two games in one trip to a city, members of a team's traveling party are essentially restricted to their individual hotel rooms and the rink, an artificial bubble when an actual one is unattainable.

"I think the guys are starting to learn that the road might be a little different, in addition to our daily lives here in Raleigh," Jordan Staal said. "I think the staff and everyone here has done a great job of making sure the players are aware of what we need to do."

The NHL has the benefit of not only the Return to Play experience but also the leagues that came before them, as both MLB and the NFL had hurdles to overcome in staging their seasons. Lessons from those instances helped guide protocols, as the Canes and the NHL as a whole aim to avoid having the 2020-21 campaign derailed, even temporarily, by COVID-19.

"The first thing that comes to my mind is contact tracing. Look at the situation that happened with the Broncos and their quarterbacks. They had to play a wide receiver at quarterback for a game because all the quarterbacks were in one meeting without their masks on," Slavin said. "We have to make sure we're following the protocols strictly to make sure no one misses a game when they don't have to miss a game."

One hallmark of a championship culture is togetherness, often achieved through team-building activities or simply hanging out away from the rink. That could be virtually non-existent this season as protocols intend to limit outside contact.

Luckily for the Canes, they're returning essentially the same team that spent three-and-a-half weeks together in Toronto just a handful of months ago.

"In the past, you talk about getting together, hanging out and being around each other. Everything you've preached and wanted to see, now you don't want to see. You turn the dressing room upside down, take the lounges away," head



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coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We've got to use our time wisely when we are together here and on the ice."

In many ways, progressing through this season as safely as possible is going to resemble the way we all have progressed through our daily lives for the last 10 months: by being smart, by taking precautions and by looking out for our neighbors.

Pesce Happy to be Healthy, Back on the Ice

Pesce: 'My shoulder hasn't felt this good in a long time, so I'm thankful'

by Michael Smith

Before Monday, it had been almost a full calendar year since Brett Pesce was on the ice for a Carolina Hurricanes practice.

It was a long time coming.

"It was awesome. I've been waiting for this for a long time now," he said on episode 157 of CanesCast. "It was just good to be out there working hard with the guys."

Though Feb. 22 in Toronto was arguably the most memorable night of 2020 for the Canes, it came at a price. They lost three players on their active roster, including Pesce, who injured his right shoulder in the second period.

Pesce underwent surgery in early March, and even though there was an outside opportunity to bring him into the bubble had the Canes made a deep playoff run, Pesce was ultimately shelved for the balance of the 2019-20 season.

"When you're watching your team go to battle without you, it's tough. It's not a good feeling," he said. "I'm just glad that we're back and I'm healthy."

With the months of rehab that followed, it was a grind to obtain that full bill of health following surgery.

"Understand that if somebody gets [the virus], you're going to hurt the team," Staal said. "No one is immune to this thing, but we're going to do our best to stay out of that mess and take care of each other."

"It was a pretty difficult and painful process. It wasn't fun in the first few months," Pesce said. "My shoulder hasn't felt this good in a long time, so I'm thankful."

Pesce, who the Canes selected in the third round (66th overall) of the 2013 NHL Draft, skated alongside Brady Skjei in Monday's first training camp skate. Two days after Pesce was injured in Toronto, the Canes acquired Skjei from the New York Rangers, one of a trio of moves made on trade deadline day.

While the Canes might tinker with defensive pairs over the next week, the Skjei-Pesce combo could be one that makes its debut on Jan. 14 in Detroit.

"The first thing that sticks out is his skating ability. He's such a good skater, and he's really good with the puck. He's just a really good player," Pesce said of his partner. "He's a stud, and I'm fortunate to be playing with him."

The Canes are fortunate to have Pesce back in the lineup. And the most important part? He's healthy. That's a refreshing feeling.

"I feel 100 percent, and I haven't felt like that in a long time," he said. "It was a long time coming, and I'm just excited that hockey's back."



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Hamilton wants to stay with Hurricanes

Defenseman entering final year of contract, can become unrestricted free agent after season

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Dougie Hamilton said he wants to remain with the Carolina Hurricanes and is hopeful a new contract will be worked out.

The 27-year-old defenseman can become an unrestricted free agent after this season, the final of a six-year contract he signed with the Calgary Flames on June 30, 2015.

"For me, I'd like to stay here, but I'm going to let my agent (J.P. Barry) and [Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell] talk," Hamilton said. "I just want to focus on hockey and helping the team win."

Hamilton scored 40 points (14 goals, 26 assists) in 47 games last season and was among the leading contenders for the Norris Trophy as the top defenseman in the NHL before fracturing his left fibula against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Jan. 16. He was able to finish rehab and return for the Eastern Conference First Round, when he scored two points (one goal, one assist) in five games against the Boston Bruins.

Since being acquired by Carolina in a trade from Calgary on June 23, 2018, Hamilton has scored 79 points, including leading NHL defensemen with 32 goals, in 129 games.

"From what I've heard, we've certainly been trying to sign him," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I think that's a priority. He's a big part of our team."

If contract talks drag on throughout the season, Brind'Amour said he does not expect it to become a distraction.

"I understand that being in that situation can certainly put pressure on a player, so we don't want to do that," Brind'Amour said. "Hopefully, they come to some sort of agreement because we love him around here."

In November, Waddell said he was hopeful to get Hamilton's contract taken care of before the season started, although they waited a bit before starting negotiations to see how the coronavirus pandemic and the NHL salary cap remaining at \$81.5 million would impact the free agent market.

"We'd like to get that one done sooner than later," Waddell said. "That one, you would have doubts if you play out the season, so it makes sense to try to get something done before the start of the season."

The Hurricanes, who will play in the Discover Central Division, begin their season at the Detroit Red Wings on Jan. 14.



Carolina Hurricanes aim to build on 2 straight playoff trips

By Aaron Beard

The Carolina Hurricanes have gone from spending a decade out of the playoffs to putting together consecutive postseason appearances. They're hoping that has them poised to accomplish much more in this delayed season.

The Hurricanes have a roster filled with players who reached the Eastern Conference finals in 2019 in the franchise's first playoff trip since 2009. The core of that group followed by returning to the playoffs after the NHL's restart amid the coronavirus pandemic.

That two-year run has elevated expectations, with president and general manager Don Waddell saying after last season that team talk was no longer about "just making playoffs anymore."

"It didn't end the way we wanted it to end and I think that's the fuel here, the fire to say, 'OK we've got to be better than that,'" third-year coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

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

The Hurricanes' returnees include center Sebastian Aho (38 goals) and winger Andrei Svechnikov (24 goals) as young stars, defenseman Dougie Hamilton (named to last year's NHL All-Star Game before being sidelined by injury) and two goaltenders who each helped the Hurricanes to postseason wins.

"Everyone knows the systems already," defenseman Jaccob Slavin said as the team began a shortened training camp. "Guys are ready to go."



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The Hurricanes are trying to make three straight playoff trips for the first time since relocating to North Carolina in 1997 from Hartford, Connecticut.

Some things to know about the Hurricanes this season:

SVECH'S GROWTH

The Hurricanes are eager to see Svechnikov's third-year growth.

The 6-foot-2 winger and No. 2 overall draft pick provided a physical presence on Carolina's top line alongside Aho last season. The 20-year-old also had the first postseason hat trick in franchise history in a Stanley Cup qualifier series win against the New York Rangers.

"During my first year, I came here, I didn't know anyone, I didn't know the system ... and how to play hockey in the NHL," Svechnikov said. "Obviously I got more confident. I got to know how to play every situation, every system, so it's going to be way easier than my first two years."

NET DUO

The Hurricanes return goaltenders Petr Mrazek and James Reimer, who both worked the three-game sweep of the Rangers and the five-game loss to the Boston Bruins.

Brind'Amour said the rotation sets up well in a revamped schedule that will typically feature consecutive games against the same opponent.

"It would be tough to ride one goalie in this schedule, I don't see how you could do it," Brind'Amour said. "It's good to know

we've already done this kind of rotation with these two guys and feel real confident in it."

CENTER STRENGTH

The Hurricanes look solid up the middle with Aho, midseason acquisition Vincent Trocheck and captain Jordan Staal at center.

Trocheck, acquired from Florida at the February trade deadline, played just seven games with Carolina before the stoppage and had two assists in eight postseason games.

"I'm looking forward to having ... a year of him under our belt to see kind of what he can bring," Brind'Amour said. "Because I think we have a really good player there."

NEW LOOK

The Hurricanes must replace the veteran presence of Justin Williams, who retired in October after a 19-year NHL career. Carolina also lost defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk (signed with Washington) and Joel Edmundson (traded to Montreal).

The Hurricanes signed winger Jesper Fast to a three-year deal. The 28-year-old Fast played seven seasons with the Rangers, finishing with 12 goals and 17 assists last year.

SCHEDULE WATCH

The Hurricanes open Jan. 14 at Detroit in the first of a two-game set, followed by two games at Nashville. Carolina's home opener is Jan. 21 against Florida.

The Hurricanes also have an eight-game home stand in April before closing the 56-game schedule at Nashville on May 7-8.



Hamilton hoping to re-sign with Hurricanes

Playing for the third team in his NHL career, Dougie Hamilton is hoping to stay put with the Carolina Hurricanes as he enters a contract year. Hamilton is currently set to play out the last of a six-year, \$34.5 million contract signed with the Calgary Flames in 2015.

Playing for the third team in his NHL career, Dougie Hamilton is hoping to stay put with the Carolina Hurricanes as he enters a contract year.

Hamilton is currently set to play out the last of a six-year, \$34.5 million contract signed with the Calgary Flames in 2015. The 27-year-old defenceman, who is entering his third season with the Hurricanes, carries a \$5.75 million cap hit.

"For me, I'd like to stay here, but I'm going to let my agent (J.P. Barry) and [Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell] talk," Hamilton said, per NHL.com. "I just want to focus on hockey and helping the team win."

Acquired from the Flames in 2018, Hamilton posted 14 goals and 40 points in 47 games last season, adding one goal and two points in five games during the NHL's Return to Play.

"From what I've heard, we've certainly been trying to sign him," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I think that's a priority. He's a big part of our team."

Drafted ninth overall by the Boston Bruins in 2009, Hamilton has 96 goals and 299 points in 552 games with the Bruins, Flames and Hurricanes over his NHL career.

Brind'Amour noted he'd be happy to see Hamilton sign before the season to avoid the pressure of a contract year.

"I understand that being in that situation can certainly put pressure on a player, so we don't want to do that," Brind'Amour said. "Hopefully, they come to some sort of agreement because we love him around here."

Looking ahead, the Hurricanes have \$52.6 million committed to 12 players for the 2021-22 season, according to CapFriendly.



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NHL training camp news: Hamilton wants to stay with Hurricanes; Chara skates with Capitals

By Adam Gretz

Checking in on what is happening in the NHL as training camps continue around the league.

Dougie Hamilton wants to stay with Hurricanes

The Carolina Hurricanes have a lot of contracts to deal with after this season, and defenseman Dougie Hamilton will be one of the biggest.

Hamilton is entering the final year of his contract with the team and will be eligible for unrestricted free agency after this season. If he hits the open market he will be one of the top players available. It sounds like there is a mutual interest in making sure it never gets to that point.

The veteran defenseman said on Tuesday that is hopeful to re-sign with the team, via NHL.com.

General manager Don Waddell previously said he would like to get something done before the season. "That one, you would have doubts if you play out the season, so it makes sense to try to get something done before the start of the season."

Hamilton was magnificent during the 2019-20 season and was putting together a Norris Trophy caliber season before an injury sidelined him for the second half of the regular season. He still finished seventh in the voting. The 27-year-old has spent two years with the Hurricanes, tallying 32 goals and 79 total points in his 129 games with the team. That goal total is tops among all defensemen in the league during that stretch even though he missed 25 games. He has scored at least 10 goals in each of his past six seasons, while also posting elite possession numbers.

His current contract is a team friendly deal against the salary cap at \$5.75 million per season. His next contract may not be.

Zdeno Chara takes the ice with Capitals

New defenseman Zdeno Chara was on the ice for the Washington Capitals on Tuesday, skating with the team's second practice group. He was not with the team on Monday while quarantining and going through all of the league's COVID-19 protocols. Chara will join the Capitals' main practice group on Wednesday.

This is strange to see. Not only because it is Zdeno Chara in Capitals gear, but also that music!

More news and notes from around the NHL

- David Perron was on the St. Louis Blues top line on Tuesday — alongside Ryan O'Reilly and Brayden Schenn — after undergoing hernia surgery during the offseason.

Meanwhile, veteran forward Mike Hoffman was skating on the team's second line with Robert Thomas and Jaden Schwartz. That is a heck of a top-six for the Blues, and that is without the services of Vladimir Tarasenko who will open the regular season on LTIR.

Defenseman Torey Krug, the other big offseason addition in St. Louis, was skating on the top-pairing alongside veteran Colton Parayko.

- Philadelphia Flyers defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere has heard the trade rumors and only wants to focus on getting back to being the player that he was. He was limited to just 42 games a year ago and posted by far the worst numbers of his NHL career. Will a fresh start and better health this season get him back on track?

- Joe Pavelski was back on the ice for the Dallas Stars today after missing practice on Monday.

The intriguing thing here is Hintz and Gurianov on the top line. Both players were outstanding for the Stars a year ago and have absolutely earned a larger role. Gurianov was not only the Stars' leading goal scoring in the regular season and playoffs, he was one of the most efficient goal scorers in the entire NHL when you factor in his ice time and usage.

Using those two players more this season could be a big factor in the Stars improving their offense, and making up for the early absence of Tyler Seguin.

- The Edmonton Oilers opened training camp this week with Zack Kassian and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins playing on Connor McDavid's wings. This is not the first time they have used Kassian in that spot, with mixed results in the past. It certainly boosts Kassian's production to skate in that spot. Sportsnet has more on that.

Free agent acquisition Kyle Turris was centering the third line between Josh Archibald and 2017 No. 4 overall pick Jesse Puljujarvi. Depending on how Turris and Puljujarvi play this season that third line has some intriguing potential.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Svechnikov looks to continue growth in year three

Andrei Svechnikov made a huge leap from year one to year two of his career last season. And he's far from done improving.

By Andrew Schnittker

Andrei Svechnikov has packed quite a bit into the first two years of his NHL career.

Since being picked second in the 2018 draft, Svechnikov followed a solid rookie season with a breakout sophomore year in which he became the first NHL player to successfully score a lacrosse-style goal (and did it again). He suffered a concussion in a fight with Alex Ovechkin in his first playoff action, and a significant lower body injury in a net-front tangle with Zdeno Chara in his second. Svechnikov has already seen, done and learned more than a lot of players do in their first two years.

Now, as he enters year three looking to continue his ascent, it's clear Svechnikov has made leaps and bounds in terms of confidence and comfortability from his rookie year. It was clear watching his play on the ice last season, and in the Hurricanes' abbreviated training camp so far. It's clear in his answers to interview questions. And it's a sentiment that he agrees with.

"I think I'm pretty comfortable, to be honest," Svechnikov said. "My first year, I came here, I didn't know anyone and I didn't know the system, how to play hockey in the NHL. Obviously, I got more confident. I got to know how to play in every situation and every system. So it's going to be way easier than my first two years."

But that comfort doesn't mean Svechnikov doesn't still want to grow his game. He said he wants to improve everywhere, including being more of a leader for the team. And, looking at the leap he made from year one to year two, no one should doubt Svechnikov's desire to grow.

In a mostly sheltered role from head coach Rod Brind'Amour, Svechnikov produced a solid season in just 14:39 per game. He posted 37 points and hit the 20-goal mark, despite receiving minimal power-play time and not scoring a single goal on the man advantage.

In his second year, as Svechnikov made the necessary improvements to his all-around game, Brind'Amour's trust in him grew, as did his role and production. Svechnikov's ice time increased to 16:44 per game, and he scored 24 goals and 61 points in just 68 regular-season games. He earned a spot on the top power-play unit, and scored six goals with the Canes a man up.

The 20-year-old Russian winger blossomed rapidly into the elite goal sorcerer the Canes drafted, with a heavy wrist shot and strong power game. The lacrosse goals were just a bonus.

As Svechnikov looks to make another leap in year three, it's something Brind'Amour's counting on. He's seen it before, after all.

"As far as development, I think he's just going to keep getting better and better," Brind'Amour said. "He came in as a kid, and he's still a young man, but his willingness to get better is why he's going to keep getting better. He's working out, getting stronger. All his skills are there. Now you add the strength, and to me, the confidence that he's gained, he's just going to continue to grow."

Not that there won't be challenges for Svechnikov. As his prowess grows, so too will his reputation, and the amount of attention he receives from defenders in the offensive zone.

But that's something Svechnikov's faced before in his hockey career, and he's confident in his ability to adapt.

"It's kind of like when I played my junior hockey, it was always like that," Svechnikov said. "I'm always ready. I'm going to do what I can do. Especially on the power play, when I walk in from the left side and try to shoot, sometimes guys know I'm going to shoot that puck, so they try to come to me right away. But there's always some ways you can pass the puck or shoot through him, so I'm going to try to do that."

Another major challenge Svechnikov, like every player in the league, will face is diving right into a short season where every game means more, following a short training camp with no exhibition games.

Svechnikov said he likes playing the exhibition games to get a feel for the game, but knows the team will do its best with scrimmages and intense practices to be ready for the season. He knows everyone's been training hard in preparation. He's included in that group, and, as Brind'Amour mentioned, that training should pay dividends in terms of added strength.

"I think I added some muscle, because I've been working out for three or four months," Svechnikov said. "Obviously I got stronger and faster. It was my goal, I've been working out hard. So we'll see what the effect is going to be on the ice."

One of the aspects of this unique season gives Svechnikov an added bonus to look forward to. The Canes will play in a division with the Detroit Red Wings, the team of his older brother, Evgeny Svechnikov.

If the arm injury Evgeny reportedly suffered during Red Wings practice Tuesday isn't too serious, then the Svechnikovs should get a chance to face off this season with Carolina and Detroit scheduled to play eight times. And it would be the first time in their hockey careers the brothers Svechnikov have lined up as opponents.

"I actually start thinking about that everyday when I go to sleep," Svechnikov said. "It's going to be so much fun to play



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against each other. It was kind of our little dream to play against each other. So it's going to be a lot of fun. Maybe if I see him on the first shift, I'll try to hit him or something. We'll see."

Whether it's his brother, or anyone else in the new Central Division, that he's lined up against, a stronger, faster, more

confident Svechnikov should be a force to be reckoned with. As the Hurricanes look to achieve their ultimate goal of competing for a Stanley Cup, they'll need a further-improved Svechnikov to take center stage.

If the first two years of his career are anything to judge by, he'll be ready.

COVID protocols to provide unique challenge for bubble-less NHL teams

The NHL season is set to begin next week, and COVID protocols and regulations are going to play a big part in the months ahead.

By Alec_Sawyer

During the summer, it felt like the NHL pulled off a near miracle getting the 2019-20 season restarted and finished, implementing the bubbles in Toronto and Edmonton to ensure a safe, unique ending to a season that was suddenly halted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bubble experiences were relatively seamless, with no real issues arising during the two months that teams were sequestered away in those two Canadian cities.

Now the NHL is about to embark on a likely more daunting challenge, as the 2021 season is set to begin next week without the safeties or benefits that the bubbles offered. Players won't be isolated, instead spending their time at home, well, at home with their families, while also hitting the road as a pandemic still encompasses the continent.

Things will be much, much different for the Hurricanes and every other team, as they now have to worry not only about the hockey aspect of things, but also about following protocols and staying safe. While the players feel they know what's going on and what's expected of them thanks to the league and organization, according to Canes' captain Jordan Staal, it's still an unusual road ahead.

"I'm sure there will be hiccups throughout the year," Staal said. "We need to understand that if somebody gets it, it's going to hurt the team and it's going to be bad. You're gonna be out for a couple weeks, and it's not good. So, the guys are aware. They understand that no one is immune to this thing, but we're gonna do our best to stay out of that mess and take care of each other."

The NHL certainly won't be the first American sports league dealing with these issues, as MLB, the NFL and now the NBA have all had bubble-less seasons at least begin. For MLB, there were a few, as Staal said, "hiccups" along the way, but the league more or less got a full season in without a major shutdown.

The NFL, which just finished up the final week of its regular season, got things in, but that doesn't necessarily things went smoothly. When asked about what big issues may arise that he's seen in other leagues, Hurricanes defenseman Jaccob Slavin referenced a situation in which the Denver Broncos were forced to play a game without a quarterback after all their quarterbacks were ruled ineligible to play through contact tracing after a positional meeting.

That issue of contact tracing has been a big talking point in the NFL and college football, and it's one that Slavin said is

something they need to keep in mind. The solution for him is just making sure that everybody is following protocols to a T.

"It's just making sure that we are following those protocols strictly, and just making sure that nobody is missing a game when they didn't have to miss a game," Slavin said. "I think that's probably the biggest thing that we're going to have to adjust to and stay honest with."

Apart from the added protocols and safety measures, there are a lot of other things that will be different when the NHL season starts up next week. Teams are only playing divisional games, in much different divisions, and the season has been shortened significantly.

The schedule looks a lot different as well, with most games coming in pairs; back-to-back games against the same team in the same location over the course of three or four days. That change is something Carolina head coach Rod Brind'Amour said he is all for as someone who isn't the biggest fan of travelling.

Another big change comes in the form of the weeks leading up to the season, as training camp has been condensed and preseason games have been given the axe. NHL squads will have just eight days of camp before the season, which started Monday for the Canes.

As far as the lack of preseason games goes, the Canes seem to have a mixed bag of feelings on that one. Slavin said he views that as a con, saying he enjoys having those games to get a feel for things. Brind'Amour said the players will probably like not having the preseason while he'll feel bad missing that chance to see things on the ice before they matter, while Staal said "I think the older you get, the more boring preseasons get."

But perhaps the biggest change for the Hurricanes this season will come off the ice, as COVID-19 will take away something that is all too important for the success of a team; the ability to spend time together and bond.

"In the past, you talked about getting together and really hanging out," Brind'Amour said. "Everything that you've kind of preached and wanted to see in your guys, you actually now don't want to see...It is a challenge to try and figure that out. That's a huge component of any team, is coming together. We've got to use our time wisely, I guess, when we are together here"

Now, the Canes and the rest of the NHL won't get that vital bonding time. There won't be guys hanging out in the lounges and locker rooms, guys getting together after practices for dinner and drinks.

The team's time together will be mostly limited to the time on the ice and around the ice, and even that time will look



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different with social distancing protocols in place. And while that lack of bonding will hit every team hard, this Canes team is maybe built as well as any to handle that.

With a roster that is, for the most part, unchanged from a year ago, this team has already spent plenty of time bonding over the past few years.

"You want a team that's tight. You want a team that hangs out with each other," Staal said. "We're learning on that. We'll make due. We've got the same squad here for a little while,

Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25, #4: Jake Bean

Will 2021 finally be Jake Bean's breakthrough year?

By Brett Finger

Whenever Jake Bean is a topic of conversation, my mind goes back to the 2016 NHL Draft.

Right on the heels of using first-round picks in consecutive years on left-handed defensemen, the expectation was that then-general manager Ron Francis and company would use their first of two 2016 first-rounders on a forward.

After a run of forwards that saw Clayton Keller, Alex Nylander, Tyson Jost, and Logan Brown all come off the board, the leading candidates at Carolina's spot were Kieffer Bellows, Luke Kunin, and German Rubtsov, among others.

Instead, the name called at number 13 overall was that of the slight, offensive-minded, left-handed defenseman.

A lot has changed since then, especially within the Hurricanes organization. The franchise has gone through a complete overhaul from the executive offices to the on-ice product. One thing hasn't changed, though.

Not knowing for sure if Bean was the right pick.

I'd be lying if I said that 2021 would definitely be the year that we gain some much-needed clarity, but we do know a bit more about Bean now as he enters the final year of his entry-level contract.

In his 2018-19 rookie season in the AHL, Bean was an instant impact player, compiling 13 goals and 44 points over the course of 70 regular-season games and earning a spot on the AHL All-Rookie team. He helped fuel a Calder Cup championship run for the Checkers after getting a brief NHL call-up in November of that season wherein he dressed for two games and didn't eclipse nine minutes of ice time in either of them.

Charlotte underwent quite the roster turnover ahead of the 2019-20 season, putting a lot of pressure on Bean to step up in his age 21 campaign.

He did that and then some last season. He went from a .63 point-per-game player to a .87 point-per-game player while taking on an even larger role on Charlotte's blue line. He won the Eddie Shore Award for the AHL's top defenseman after leading all defenders in points.

At this point, there's really nothing left for Bean to accomplish at the AHL level. He's a champion, an all-star, and he's been acknowledged as the league's best player at his position. The

and we're already close. We've got a good squad, so we're having some fun with it."

There's no question that the 2021 NHL season will be unlike any before it, and handling all the changes off the ice will be as important to a team's success as handling things on the ice. It's been a crazy couple of months for NHL executives, players and fans alike, but it's all coming to a head now.

Next Thursday night in Detroit, the puck will drop on a new season of Carolina Hurricanes hockey, and for a couple of hours things might feel somewhat normal again.

only thing left for him to do is put that league in the rearview mirror.

His game has grown by leaps and bounds over the last two years, to the extent that it's shocking that he's still just 22 years old - because he certainly doesn't look like a young player anymore.

Everything that was suspected of Bean when he was drafted has held true to this point. He's a dynamic puck-mover with a deadly shot and excellent instincts. One of the best parts of his game is still his ability to deceive opponents with his eyes and hands when moving the puck.

There isn't much of a question as to whether his offense will translate to the NHL. He's too good for it not to. The real question now is, and stop me if you've heard this one before, whether he will be able to keep pace with and defend against NHL players.

Especially last season, Bean took massive strides forward defensively. He just looked so calm and composed in all areas. Unfortunately, we never saw him get an opportunity at the NHL level, so until he gets that chance, he will remain a big question mark among the ever-growing group of talented defensemen that the Hurricanes notoriously hold near and dear.

Therein lies the biggest hurdle in Bean's way - the sheer number of defensemen that this team has and there only being six spots available. Jake Gardiner and Brady Skjei project to occupy the left side of the second and third defensive pairings, and they combine to take up \$9.3 million in cap space per season through 2022-23 - that's 11.4% of the NHL's current \$81.5 million salary cap.

I've been asking this question for the better part of a year now - at what point is it just more logical to remove one of those players and replace them with Bean? How much of a downgrade could he possibly be to, say, Gardiner. If Gardiner is getting 12-15 minutes per game, I don't see how it is worth having him over Bean, especially given the clear lack of trust the coaching staff showed in his game last season.

It's difficult to make an argument for a number five defenseman carrying a \$4+ million cap hit. The Hurricanes can get away with it for now, but if they need to add a piece at the deadline, being so close to the cap ceiling will be a hurdle. And they will certainly be in trouble when Dougie Hamilton and Andrei Svechnikov start taking up \$15 million in combined cap space starting next season.



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Perhaps the long game here is to eventually bring Bean into the fold after a defenseman is sent off in the expansion draft. Or maybe he will just be the odd man out.

The 2021 season will be unique in its challenges for everyone, but hopefully, we finally see Bean get a real chance. He has absolutely earned it. We can all project and predict whether he will be a legitimate top-four NHL defenseman or a fifth

defenseman power-play specialist or something else. Still, until he gets the opportunity to play, those are all moot points.

Will this be the year of Jake Bean? With the Canes' logjam on defense, the expiration of his ELC looming, and the Seattle expansion draft due up later this year, I feel very confident saying that the answer is...

Maybe?



Canes finding ways to bond as a team amid COVID-19 pandemic

by: Todd Gibson

RALEIGH, N.C. (WNCN) — The Carolina Hurricanes gather around head coach Rod Brind'Amour, close but not too close. Not during these time.

"You want that team spirit, you want to be close to each other and work with each other and be that tight a tight-knit team," said Canes Captain Jordan Staal. "But at the same time not too close and too tight and wear a mask."

The Hurricanes practice facility, the Wake Competition Center wasn't the only thing new as Carolina gathered for the first time this season. New rules and protocols will make this a season like no other.

"It's different in the sense that, getting used to wearing these (masks) around the rink and the locker room," explained Canes defenseman Jaccob Slavin. "Just all the little protocols

we have to go through is different but we've got to do what we've got to do to be able to play this season."

That means not being around your teammates as much as in the past. Spending extra time in the locker room or hanging out in the lounge playing ping pong is now frowned upon. Those team bonding moments crucial to building a tight team are now a thing of the past.

"In the past, you talked about getting together and really hanging out and being around each other," said Brind'Amour. "It's like everything you always preached and wanted to see in your guys now you actually now don't want to see. It's all about that camaraderie and I think everyone's just trying to figure that out, how we're going to adjust to that."

The good news for the Canes, this team saw very little turnover from a year ago. That familiarity should give Carolina a leg up on a season where getting close is a no-no.

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SportScan

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

1181380 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina Hurricanes 2020-21 Season Preview

BY DYLAN RUDOLPH JANUARY 5TH, 2021

A new year, a new Carolina Hurricanes. Well, not really.

After ending the 2019-20 season with a loss to the Boston Bruins in the first round of the playoff bubble, the Hurricanes remained largely inactive in free agency, instead opting to rely on their young core of players to continue to develop.

The move makes sense given the talent already present on the roster, but it also introduces some lingering questions as the Hurricanes begin training camp for the new season.

Will the Goaltender Be Found?

A position most thought the Hurricanes would address during this offseason was the goaltender spot. They ran the 2019-20 season with a 1A/1B tandem of veterans Petr Mrázek and James Reimer. Together, the two combined for 35 wins in 65 games played, and each posted save percentages over .900, as well as helping in Carolina's sweep of the New York Rangers in the playoff bubble's qualifying round.

The Hurricanes were assuredly a competitive team with the duo in net. However, neither goaltender distinguished himself to be good enough to be the primary starter long term. And Carolina remains in limbo on what to do for perhaps the most important position in hockey.

Petr Mrazek Carolina Hurricanes

But whether Waddell and the front office want to or not, a decision is coming. Mrázek and Reimer's contracts both expire at the end of the season, and the Seattle Kraken Expansion Draft will also force Carolina to choose just one goalie in its system to protect.

While time still remains, the Hurricanes must find a resolution, whether it be to stick with one of Mrázek or Reimer, make a move for another enticing veteran like Marc-André Fleury, or even giving a prospect like Alex Nedeljkovic his shot. The future holds so many possibilities, and the Hurricanes have plenty of options, but they still need to find the goaltender of the future.

Depth Scoring Needed

Carolina fans have a lot to be excited about in this new year in terms of offense. The top of the lineup contains young, exciting names like Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teräväinen. The blue line possesses solid two-way defensemen like Dougie Hamilton and Jaccob Slavin, who have shown they can step up offensively when needed. But while the headliner names have earned their praise, the contributions from the depth lines have left some to be desired.

A lack of scoring from players lower on the depth chart was a big reason Carolina ranked just 15th in total goals last season despite its top three players scoring nearly a point-per-game.

The Hurricanes' dormancy during free agency frustrated some, but it sent the message that they are sticking to the plan of allowing its young roster to develop as it comes of age. A patient approach and admirable if it pans out, but it also adds pressure on younger players like Morgan Geekie and Martin Necas to help carry the load for the scoring outside of the top line as Carolina hopes to compete for a Stanley Cup this season.

Martin Necas Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina's one big move in free agency did attempt to help remedy this issue. They signed veteran winger Jesper Fast to a three-year deal in October, a move that garnered praise from Waddell, calling Fast a "versatile player who fits the mold" of Hurricanes' head coach Rod Brind'Amour's system with his ability to facilitate the puck.

No matter who leads the way, Carolina will still need help from its depth players and darkhorse contributors if it truly wants to be a top team.

Revenge in the Playoffs

Last year, the Hurricanes made the playoffs in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 2001 and 2002. A remarkable feat, but their run came to an end at the hands of a familiar foe.

The Boston Bruins have had the Hurricanes' number for a while now, winning 14 of their last 16 matchups, including a sweep in the Conference Finals in 2019 and swiftly beating the Canes in five games in the playoff bubble last season.

Dougie Hamilton, David Backes

Every team must overcome obstacles to get to the promised land, and if the Hurricanes truly want to compete — for which they have the talent to do so — the Bruins provide the metaphorical hump that they may need to overcome. The Canes will need to be motivated for whoever they face, but if they want to make a dream run reminiscent of 2006, the Bruins will most likely be there waiting.

Carolina has a golden opportunity to turn a strange new year into a positive one. The shortened season plays right into their strengths, hopefully reducing the injury bug that hindered their campaign last season. A young team like Carolina only needs a few breaks to go its way, and 2021 could produce a second Stanley Cup.

Hockey Writers LOADED: 01.06.2021

1181526 Websites

The Athletic / Love it or hate it, NHL's sponsored division names are economically critical

By Scott Burnside Jan 5, 2021

Maybe over time the names will simply slide like melted butter off fans' tongue: Scotia NHL North Division, Honda NHL West Division, Discover NHL Central Division and MassMutual NHL East Division.



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Perhaps it will be forever a mouthful of thistles and fans will be so enraged by the NHL selling off its naming rights to longtime sponsors that you'll never allow an NHL game to appear on a screen or tablet and will never again darken the doorway of an arena in any division.

We're guessing the NHL is banking on the latter and not the former as the league continues to chart a course through the unknown COVID-19 waters by selling off the naming rights to its four newly realigned divisions.

It's possible those names are a one-off and the league goes back to its standard Pacific, Central, Atlantic and Metropolitan alignment next season when officials are hopeful the league can return to normal, although marketing experts that spoke to The Athletic Tuesday wondered if having tapped into a new revenue stream those revenues would be difficult to walk away from. Still one thing is certain, whether people love them or hate them, or whether anyone ever uses the sponsored names, Tuesday's reveal was a critical part of cobbling together an economic plan to see the NHL and its players through a truncated 56-game schedule that begins Jan. 13.

"Just got to get through this year in one piece," one longtime senior NHL executive said Tuesday. "It's tough."

But as much as the corporate intrusion into the formerly pristine standings of the NHL may be jarring, it should hardly come as any surprise after the NHL was forced to halt the 2019-20 season in mid-March and then returned to play in twin bubbles in Toronto and Edmonton in August.

A handful of franchises will be able to allow a small percentage of fans in their buildings during this coming season but many teams are facing the reality they may not have any fans in their buildings until next season.

Hence the move to explore brand new sources of revenue.

The divisional naming rights follows on the heels of helmet ads being revealed for a number of teams.

Another NHL team president said the two were critical to help offset the huge losses every NHL team is facing.

Cary Kaplan is the president of Cosmos Sports and Entertainment based in the Toronto area. He is also the former president of the AHL's Hamilton Bulldogs and the current president of the ECHL Brampton Beast.

While there is something to be said for hockey's traditions, sometimes those traditional views get in the way of progress, Kaplan said.

He felt the NHL's move to sell naming rights to the divisions was an inspired move.

"I'm all in favor of it," Kaplan said. "I don't think it's a slippery slope, I think it's a slope in the right direction."

"I don't think it needs to be a one-off."

Those partners, especially major national brands like Scotiabank and Honda have already invested "millions and millions and millions of dollars on hockey," Kaplan said.

They've helped to create the current salary structure and they've by extension helped create jobs for team staff and arena workers.

"I think they are true partners of the NHL," Kaplan said.

"I was not surprised," at the NHL's move to sell sponsorship of the divisions, said Don Roy, a marketing professor at Middle Tennessee State University with a specialty in sports marketing and sponsorship.

All sports leagues and sports properties "are going to have to turn over every rock to find new sources of revenue because they are taking a huge hit," on everything from ticket revenue, to premium seat sales, to food and beverage, parking and concessions, Roy said.

He noted that all four of the division sponsors are longtime NHL partners and that the realignment of the divisions allows for a sponsor like MassMutual to target a specific geographic area without having to step into a truly national advertising footprint.

As for the swift social media backlash, that too wasn't all that surprising given the proprietary nature of hockey fans and the resistance to change that might be seen as abandoning the game's history or roots.

It's a fine line, Roy said, "because you don't want to come across as too commercial."

Among other novel ways to create interest in the game and boost revenue, the NHL is planning a fan-free outdoor weekend of hockey in the Lake Tahoe area in February with nationally broadcast games featuring the Vegas Golden Knights versus the Colorado Avalanche and the Philadelphia Flyers versus the Boston Bruins.

Whether it's sponsored divisional names or exploring ads on jerseys — as the NBA has done — or having outdoor games without fans, Roy thinks this season may provide opportunities for the NHL to explore marketing the game in brand new ways.

Given the limitations imposed by the pandemic, "are there ways to engage the fans and to keep strengthening those relationships beyond the live event?" Roy asked.

NHL officials would not say how much the sponsorships were worth to the league, but The Athletic's sports business reporter Daniel Kaplan estimated mid-seven figures at least.

"These deals also include media spend provisions, meaning ad spending on NHL-affiliated channels, bringing the total commitment even higher from the four companies. How much visibility the companies gain is unclear as media outlets may shy away from using the corporate names in referring to the divisions," Kaplan wrote.

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Why 2020–21 NHL season is a step into the unknown

Elliotte Friedman

- Examining lasting legacy of past 10 months
- Could Canadian Division become permanent?
- What's holding up deals for Barzal, other RFAs?

Never have I been so happy to hear, "I'm in the best shape of my life," or read tweets about first-day-of-practice defensive pairs. It feels like the NHL's been gone forever, and this training camp is a super-sized glass of Jolt Cola before an all-night study session.

What I don't think we fully grasp is the sheer unpredictability of the upcoming season. The compressed schedule, expanded rosters, uncertain attendance, added obstacles to making moves and COVID itself all make for a recipe unlike any we've seen before.

There are teams that said, "There's no point in spending any more than we have to, because, without fans in the arenas, it's impossible to break even." There are teams that said, "We're going for it, because if we give up on this year, how will fans feel about buying tickets for next year?"

The East Division is brutal, a street fight almost every night. The North (Canadian) is exciting, full of talented but flawed teams — with Ottawa determined to show better than anticipated. The Central looks tiered: the



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Stanley Cup Champion, the runner-up, two teams who won a play-in round, two that didn't, suddenly reeling Chicago and picking-itself-off-the-mat Detroit. The West is three heavyweights and who knows? The most unexpected playoff team in the NHL probably comes from there.

A bad start is almost impossible to overcome in an 82-game season, never mind a 56-gamer. From 2005–06 to 2018–19, just nine of 59 teams four points out on Nov. 1 made the playoffs. Stumble out of the gate, you're doomed.

Sometimes, it's hard to manufacture hate in the regular season. This year, with the same opponents, a baseball schedule, and a shortened season? It'll be cooked up like mozzarella sticks in your air fryer.

Players saw what the flat cap did to free agency. You can't afford a bad contract year. Some teams — particularly Montreal and Toronto at forward — have so many who could legitimately dress that you wonder how they are going to manoeuvre it all.

For the health of everyone involved, you hope COVID doesn't wreak havoc on the players, coaches, executives, officials, arena workers ... everyone. However, both Colorado and Nashville began camp with multiple players "unfit to practice." The good news is the NBA's positivity rate in its first round of training camp tests was close to 10 per cent, and has significantly dropped since. The bad news is that COVID is raging as the vaccine rolls out.

Monday, the NBA announced that all players who are dressed to play must wear a face mask until they enter the game. Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant was ordered to quarantine for seven days based on a contact-tracing exposure, even though he'd tested negative. We're constantly adjusting. What we know now might not be true 20 minutes from now.

It's possible that the lasting legacy of the past 10 months is a change in how the NHL markets itself and a new, more aggressive pursuit of revenues. As one governor said last month, "We have committees for everything, but we don't have a Revenue Committee."

Tuesday morning, the league announced that Discover, Honda, MassMutual and Scotiabank will be the name sponsors of the divisions for the 2020-21 NHL season:

There were rumours over the past couple of weeks the league was considering this path, but I didn't believe them. Like it or not, we better get used to this sort of thing. The conservative days are done, and the doors are wide open. The only question: Is this a short-term thing to save revenues and jobs, or a permanent, new reality?

There's certainly a feeling across the sport — league employees, teams, players, agents — that the shackles have to come off because circumstances demand it. You've seen the helmet ads; we'll see how the on-ice, on-bench, and along-the-glass ads look. Small jersey ads can't be far away. The outdoor games in Lake Tahoe are an excellent idea, but a break-even proposition in 2021. What we will see is if someone loves the idea enough to turn it into a revenue generator in the future.

A few executives and agents believe the Canadian Division should be given permanent consideration — that guaranteeing four of those teams a playoff spot and one a Final Four spot would drive up revenues and raise the cap. As a Sportsnet employee, sign me up. But I admit that, personally, I'm not crazy about anyone being guaranteed anything. However, as producer Matt Marstrom pointed out after Jeff Marek and I discussed it on this week's podcast, Seattle's arrival makes it more challenging from a numbers perspective.

I'm excited for this season. I'm excited to see how it will play out, and how the league changes because of what's happened. It's a step into the unknown, and we all take it together.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

31 THOUGHTS

1. One GM: "How are you going to make up rumours when quarantines make trades so hard?"

2. You could tell Patrik Laine had zero desire to answer questions about his future in Winnipeg — "I'm here, aren't I? That's the only thing I'm worried about right now." — but I wouldn't get too caught up in that. He's blunt, but recognizes the reality.

Laine arrived in Winnipeg understanding it's very possible he's a Jet all season. If a trade is what he desires, his best option is to fill the net with pucks, and that's what I'd expect him to do. I think Philadelphia considered it a few months ago, but backed away due to asset cost and salary. Laine is arbitration eligible for two more summers, then you're buying UFA years. That's a complicated contract in a flat-cap world. If Columbus believes it can get Laine to commit, that's one to watch, eventually — assuming a trade can be worked out.

Remaining Time -1:59

Laine shouldn't be distraction for Jets heading into season

3. This week's conspiracy theory: Did you know Pierre-Luc Dubois's father, Eric, coaches in the Winnipeg organization? (He's an assistant for the AHL Moose.)

4. The more I've learned about Dubois's situation, the more he, his agent and the Blue Jackets deserve credit for keeping it quiet as long as they did. I couldn't understand why Columbus was worried about an offer sheet at a time teams are strapped for cash, but one player explained it: "We knew [Dubois] was thinking of leaving, if he could."

I've asked if the situation can be fixed, but there's not a ton of optimism at this time. It wasn't the negotiations, and several sources warned against putting it solely at the feet of John Tortorella. Dubois didn't reveal much at his introductory media conference, but the aforementioned player said the feeling is Dubois wants "a bigger stage." (In the NHL, that doesn't always mean the biggest market.)

GM Jarmo Kekalainen held onto both Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin as UFAs-to-be; no one's expecting him to move quickly on Dubois.

5. Another team to keep an eye on in the short term: the Islanders. It's a good omen that Mathew Barzal is there and took his physical. There's not a lot of information when Lou Lamoriello is involved, but my sense is a long-term deal was not likely because of the team's cap situation. The player and agent would likely use Mitch Marner and/or Mikko Rantanen as comparables, and New York can't fit that right now. That takes us down to two- and three-year terms (3x\$6M, maybe?). There's optimism that it gets done, but the Islanders have to make room, too.

6. Matt Martin's extension hasn't been announced, but word is that it's a bit of a surprise — reflective of the loyalty the Islanders feel to him. One player the Islanders have tried to move (with a sweetener) is Thomas Hickey. Half of the defenceman's salary for this year is already paid via a bonus, and he's got one more year at \$2.5 million. Hickey's been through a lot personally and professionally — I hope it works out for him.

7. Other RFA business includes Jesper Bratt (New Jersey); Luke Kunin (Nashville); Jack Roslovic (Winnipeg); Aleks Saarela and Henrik Borgstrom (Florida). With the Panthers' AHL affiliate, Charlotte, announcing it will not play this season, it is sensible those two players would stay in Europe. (Although, there is some question about whether Borgstrom returns to the organization.)

Roslovic has asked for a trade, and Kunin is in Nashville as the two sides grind away at his next deal.

Bratt, meanwhile, remains in Sweden. Simply counting the days makes it hard to see him starting the season on time between getting a visa and going through quarantine. That said, it's always dicey writing about these, because things can change with one phone call. GM Tom Fitzgerald said team and player are "in constant communication," which had been the



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case, but things have stalled. Not a ton of talk, and there's a bit of a gap at this time.

8. Let's look a little more at the AHL. Like Charlotte (Florida), Milwaukee (Nashville) and Springfield (St. Louis) announced Monday they will not play this season. The Checkers and Admirals made noises for some time that this would be their route, while the Thunderbirds made a more recent decision.

If your affiliate is five hours away from your NHL home base, a quarantine is necessary. That played a role in the Blues' decision. They quickly made it public that their prospects will join Vancouver's in Utica. Florida's are expected to join Syracuse (Tampa Bay) and Nashville with Chicago (Carolina).

What wasn't announced was a playoff structure. NHL clubs have made it very clear this season is more about development than competition. The post-season is not as big a priority for them.

9. Canadian participation (Belleville, Laval, Manitoba, Toronto) remains subject to the approval of local governments. It is expected that those teams will be asked to adhere to NHL-style protocols before permission is granted. It will be expensive, but these teams feel not playing is not an option. It's also possible Ottawa and Montreal's prospects move to their NHL arenas for the season.

10. While the NHL and AHL figured out this challenging process, many unsigned players (and their agents) stressed over their futures.

"We were very worried we wouldn't find a job," one agent said after getting a client signed.

I'd expect there will be a run on getting some vets signed. One who has taken a more zen-like approach, patiently waiting for an opportunity, is Nick Baptiste, who played last season in Toronto and Belleville.

11. An AHL rule change hurt Baptiste's situation. Each team can dress five players who classify as "veterans," with more than 260 pro games. (Baptiste is above 300.) But, to qualify for that status this season, you had to be 25 by last July 1. Baptiste hit that age in August, so he's still what's known as a "developmental player," and teams will generally save those spots for younger prospects. But he's determined not to have a negative attitude.

"It's been a difficult time for a lot of guys," he said Monday. "But I've used these nine months to benefit myself."

How so?

"Understanding how quickly opportunity comes and goes, you recognize you have to be prepared for them as you get older. I've taken care of my body, and spent more time than normal on ice last summer. I had to work on in-game small-area stuff. I worked at length on quickness coming out of turns, honing on things like that."

He moved back home in the Ottawa-area with his mother and younger brother, Isaiah, an OHL Sarnia draft pick who played last year for the Nepean Raiders. He skated with a group that included Erik Karlsson and Jean-Gabriel Pageau.

"I focus on what I can control," Baptiste said. "The last couple of years hadn't gone the way I wanted.... I can control how I approach that. I'm prepared and excited."

12. As Canada and the U.S. prepare for a World Junior Gold Medal showdown on Tuesday night, Baptiste added he's been energized by something on the wall of his mother's home: a photo of him holding the Canadian flag in celebration after he and his teammates beat the Americans 3-2 in the 2013 Under-18s. Baptiste had eight points in seven games during that event, including an assist on Frederik Gauthier's gold-medal winner.

13. I think Montreal really wanted to add Mike Hoffman, but not even Simone Biles could pull off those cap gymnastics.

14. Joe Thornton starting with Mitch Marner and Auston Matthews was part of the pitch to the future Hall of Famer. Thornton and Matthews have spent a lot of time together since they arrived in Toronto (while adhering to proper protocol).

Remaining Time -2:23

Will Joe Thornton play on Leafs' top line?

15. Brett Ritchie is the mystery PTO possibility for Calgary.

16. Ottawa's moves are interesting. There's zero doubt they will be harder to play against and more competitive. They didn't want to hand roster spots to their prospects, because that's too easy. What I'm curious to see is if any of them see their routes blocked and express unhappiness about it. The Senators want those players to respond to the challenge.

17. Another vet the Senators pursued: Tyler Toffoli.

18. Travis Green is a gambler. He'll bet on himself. It's a good omen for his relationship with the Canucks that they added Travis Hamonic, because that's something Green desired. He's got a good relationship with Jim Benning. But he has a sense of his market, and he'll bet on himself to get it.

19. I do expect to see Ben Hutton somewhere soon. Boston and New Jersey are among those with interest.

20. Dallas took a run at Erik Haula.

21. When Boston was eliminated by Tampa Bay, the post-series Zoom calls were incredibly emotional. One reason that this group of Bruins won a Cup and reached two other Finals is they are determined and they care. But one source warned it was deeper than that: "They look like they know this might be it for this group," he said at the time.

That's proven prophetic with Zdeno Chara's move to Washington. The hardest part of Chara's off-season was not deciding where he was going to play, but if he was going to play. If not the Bruins, was retirement the best option for him and his family? Once he decided to compete, then he considered other options.

I'm not in any hurry to see him retire, and it's foolish to underestimate his potential impact in Washington.

22. Every time I see a Sidney Crosby/Nathan MacKinnon commercial, I wonder if they're going to find a way to play together some day.

23. In the final blog of last season, there was a note on Vince Dunn and wondering about the Blues' plans for him. In a year where a lot of players were squeezed, Dunn's one-year deal came in higher than expected. It surprised other teams. That shows the Blues think positively of him, set a high bar to trade him and probably did legwork on his next contract.

24. Boston and Philadelphia were given the option to play two games in Lake Tahoe, but decided against it.

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

25. In 2008, NBA player Keith Van Horn, who hadn't played a game in two years, was needed to complete a huge trade that sent Jason Kidd to the Dallas Mavericks. That same season, Aaron McKie, who was actually an assistant coach at the time, was activated to complete Pau Gasol's move to the Los Angeles Lakers.

"It's a legitimate method, allowed under the collective bargaining agreement," Mitch Kupchak, then the Lakers' GM, told the New York Times. "It's been done for years."

Neither player had signed retirement papers, allowing those teams the loophole to include them. I mention those moves as the Lightning's LTIR manoeuvring takes some heat. I'm in the "it doesn't bother me" camp. Not every team likes it, but player movement is critical for both fan interest and clubs to improve themselves. These loopholes are essential



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to that. They come with risks, but those are Tampa's to take. Honestly, I wish teams were allowed to trade cap space.

26. The Lightning traded for Marian Gaborik and Anders Nilsson's cap hits, but also considered Henrik Zetterberg's.

27. Wildest off-season rumour I chased: that NBA teams who shared arenas with NHL clubs wanted their hockey partners to move out for this season because of concerns COVID was more catchable in lower humidity.

28. The NHL's biggest priority right now is starting the season, but, at some point, teams are wondering if there will be any changes to the draft. Selecting 18-year-olds is already a crapshoot. Now it's going to be even harder with so few opportunities to scout them. Hopefully, the CHL finds a way (more for the kids' sake than anything), but, if not, I wonder if regional combines featuring scrimmages are created a few months down the road to give everyone an opportunity to see and be seen.

29. One thing scouts are happy about: COVID-related safety measures had previously shut down opportunities to watch potential No. 1 pick Owen Power at Michigan. That's changed, and he can be seen in person once again.

30. The best team-defence performance I've seen in a tournament was Team Canada 2014 in Sochi. With one more victory, these Canadian Juniors would be right with them — although this version of Team USA will be a handful.

31. My first game at Hockey Night in Canada was on Oct. 9, 2003. Montreal at Ottawa, on a Thursday night. We hit the air at 7:00 pm ET, with my debut appearance two minutes after the show began — a quick interview with Senators GM John Muckler. Martin Havlat was unsigned, and that's what we were going to talk about.

As the show went on-air, I heard the HNIC theme and froze. I remember thinking, "What the \$#&* am I doing here? This is Hockey Night in Canada." I turned to Muckler and said, "This is probably the first time the person interviewing you is more nervous than you are." He looked over and said, "I doubt it."

It's very possible I would have totally flopped in the moment without that great line.

The night Dominik Hasek was inducted to the Hockey Hall of Fame, I ran into Muckler. He said, "Who is your best goaltender of all time?" I replied that I'm a Patrick Roy guy. He looked at me like I urinated all over his corn flakes. "Hasek," he said dismissively, so disappointed in my answer. I laughed. RIP.

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets' Scheifele embracing chance to shine in Canadian division spotlight

Ken Wiebe

WINNIPEG — The extra bounce in his step is readily apparent, as is the enthusiasm in his voice.

When a player of Mark Scheifele's calibre is limited to three shifts in a span of roughly 10 months, it surprises no one when he's the first player out onto the ice during Winnipeg Jets training camp.

Since arriving on the scene as the first player chosen in Jets 2.0 history back in 2011, Scheifele has grown from wide-eyed teenager to

experienced top-line pivot. As he prepares for his eighth full NHL season, Scheifele is entering his prime.

He's been an elite offensive player for quite some time, chipping in at a point-per-game rate in each of the past four seasons. Just last season, Scheifele was tied for 15th in NHL scoring with frequent linemate Kyle Connor after recording 73 points in 71 games.

He's familiar with the burden of facing the top defence pairing and checking lines and has ample experience going head-to-head with the opponent's top offensive weapons.

After getting knocked out of the Jets' qualifying round series after an awkward hit that was delivered by Calgary Flames forward Matthew Tkachuk, Scheifele is eager to show that he's ready to take the next step in his development.

Remaining Time -1:13

Why Maurice expects Scheifele to elevate his game in Canadian division

While being under the spotlight is nothing new for Scheifele, the glare is expected to be even brighter during a 56-game schedule against what will be six familiar foes by the time May arrives.

"So this is a good story, I think. The timing of this all-Canadian division," said Jets head coach Paul Maurice. "I don't know that people would watch Mark Scheifele play as much as you'd see the games in Toronto or possibly the Connor McDavid games. And he wants in that mix, right? So I think you're going to see him elevate his game.

"He can sense that opportunity to be on the stage, to show off his game a little bit. And to show off all the things he can do. I'm excited for him, I think it's an opportunity that he's earned. I think he relishes it. He's trained for it and I think he's one of the guys that is very, very excited for this division. And he likes to go head-to-head with the best and show the hockey world where he sees himself."

It's not like Scheifele had it easy before.

In the Central Division, Scheifele was getting a steady diet of Nathan MacKinnon, Ryan O'Reilly and Jonathan Toews, to name a few frequent foes.

Now he's going to face Auston Matthews and John Tavares 10 times, McDavid and Leon Draisaitl on another nine occasions. For good measure, how about nine tilts against Elias Pettersson and the Vancouver Canucks? This responsibility is not for the faint of heart.

But Maurice is right, Scheifele won't shy away from it. He'll embrace the challenge instead. That's just how he's wired and the status quo is never enough.

"The learning never stops," said Scheifele, leaning on an answer he's provided numerous times before expanding on it. "You've always got to push yourself, so this summer I evaluated my game and the areas that I needed to work on and worked on them all.

"Whether that's faceoffs, D-zone coverage, shooting, passing, all that stuff. It's all something you need to work on throughout this long time off. I had plenty of time to work at it so I'm ready to get back into game action and apply all the stuff I've done all summer."

There has been plenty of chatter about what the return of veteran centre Paul Stastny can mean for sniper Patrik Laine, but it will also have a positive impact on Scheifele.

"It means a lot. He's a guy that, we sit on the bench today, we speak the same language, we're always kind of on the same wavelength," said Scheifele. "So it's awesome to have a friend like that, a guy you can bounce ideas off of, you can talk about hockey, you can talk about whatever.

"To have a guy like that in the room means a lot to me for sure, a guy that loves hockey, a guy that loves to work on his game, work on his body and do all that. (Stastny) is a specimen in that sense. A very, very



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intelligent hockey mind and to have a guy like that in the room and sitting close to you in the room, it helps a lot for sure.”

Scheifele is never lacking motivation, but the prospect of suiting up for Canada at the Olympics in 2022 should provide some additional fuel.

Although he was part of the exciting Team North America outfit that turned heads at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, Scheifele hasn't had the opportunity to represent his country on the grandest stage in a true best-on-best tournament since two appearances at the World Junior Hockey Championship.

The best way for Scheifele to ensure the prospect of being an Olympian is to deliver a determined, two-way game as both a play driver and a leader.

That's also a critical piece of the formula for the Jets' push to move back toward contender status after two early exits.

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Sportsnet.ca / Remembering John Muckler as next generation of Senators take centre stage

Wayne Scanla

Young Senators Josh Norris and Colin White were atom age hockey players when John Muckler led Ottawa into its first Stanley Cup Final of the franchise's modern era.

Speaking to Norris and White on Tuesday Zoom calls, it was hard not to think about Muckler, a giant in the game, and a big deal in the Nation's Capital when the Senators were routinely posting 100-point seasons.

The Senators general manager from 2002-07, Muckler was a five-time Stanley Cup winner as an assistant and then head coach of the dynastic Edmonton Oilers in the 1980s. He died on Monday at the age of 86. He will also be missed in Buffalo, a hockey city he called home as head coach and GM of the Sabres in the 1990s.

In June of 2007, when White would have been 10 and Norris eight, Muckler directed a Senators team coached by Bryan Murray to a five-game series win over the Sabres in the Eastern Conference Final before falling to the Anaheim Ducks in a five-game final.

Before that Cup final series, Muckler had put his fifth and final Cup ring from Edmonton on his finger as he spoke to reporters in Ottawa. The ring was from the 1990 championship, won by Muckler as head coach of an Oilers team that managed the feat without the great Wayne Gretzky, by then a member of the Los Angeles Kings.

“This one's for Jenny,” said Muckler, playing with the ring on his finger, and noting that he had promised it to his youngest daughter, but only after he might win this sixth ring with the Senators.

It wasn't to be. Muckler and the Senators not only lost to Anaheim, but Muckler was fired soon afterward and replaced as GM by Murray.

How things have changed in Ottawa over those 13 years.

Then, the Senators were a mature franchise, having peaked from their lean years in the early to mid-1990s as an expansion franchise. It was Muckler who brought former Sabres superstar goalie Dominik Hasek to Ottawa in 2005-06, a team that might have been the Senators' best, but Hasek got hurt in the Turin Olympics and didn't play in the playoffs.

Following the '07 run to the final, Ottawa entered a brief rebuilding period in 2011 and then a deeper rebuild in 2018 and '19 that players like White and Norris hope to soon help turn around.

Senators offer condolences

Senators owner Eugene Melnyk, the man who replaced Muckler with Murray, offered condolences to Muckler's family over their loss.

“John had the heart of a champion, was a consummate professional and a beloved family man,” Melnyk said, in a statement released by the club. “For years the Senators were perennial Stanley Cup contenders because of his dedication and leadership.”

“On behalf of the entire Senators organization I want to express our sincerest condolences to John's family, friends and all those whose lives he touched in the hockey community.”

White looks right and ready

White, 23, can't know much about Muckler's legacy, but he hopes to be part of the next wave of excellent hockey in Ottawa, which has been in reboot mode since a 2017 trip to the Conference Final. In fact, White is the only player left from that 2017 playoff team, having played a single game in the post-season after his NCAA season at Boston College.

White can hardly wait to start his next chapter after a rough 2019-20 season that saw him face the pressures of a new contract, a loss of confidence and a bad groin injury just nine games in.

“I tried to play through it, tough it out, and it just wasn't working for me,” White says. “I had to shut it down.”

“I came back, felt pretty good, then had another bump or bruise again. It was a tough year.”

“(These) nine months (were) great to get my body healthy. I feel the strongest I've ever been.”

Within two weeks of Ottawa's final game on March 11, White was in the gym.

“A big mindset of mine was to put on weight, and good weight, too,” he says.

Head coach D.J. Smith continues to be impressed by White in camp. On Tuesday, White was centre on a line with Nick Paul and Austin Watson.

“He's been very good, he's come back with renewed confidence,” Smith says. “He's bigger, stronger. And he's just getting to work.”

Smith feels White put pressure on himself last season and was in tough against opposing centres on the top two lines. He will be better equipped this season.

“The centre spot is a real battle right now,” White says. “It's about making sure you come in every day and do the right things and try to move yourself up that lineup.”

If White holds down a top-six spot, he just might have either Brady Tkachuk or rookie Tim Stuetzle on his left side.

“Every guy in the lineup you want to play with right now,” White says. “It's really exciting how our team is shaping up.”

Why DJ Smith likes 'trial by fire' aspect of Canadian division for Senators

Norris welcomes Stepan's experience

Just days before training camp, Norris's odds of making the starting lineup shifted when GM Pierre Dorion brought in veteran centres Derek Stepan and Cedric Paquette. Norris, 21, insists he didn't let the moves bother him.

“I can't control that,” Norris says. “They're making acquisitions to make the team better and from my perspective, those guys have been in the league a long time and if anything, I can learn from them.”



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"They're very smart players and good players. Cedric is already here and Stepan gets here in a few days."

In Tuesday's drills, Norris was on a top line with Tkachuk and Evgenii Dadonov.

"Chucky is a great player," Norris says, "and Dadonov is slick and smart with the puck."

"I'm not complaining about my linemates right now."

Norris acknowledged these are early days, and Ottawa's full lineup won't be ready until next week.

Remaining Time -1:31

New team & new baby making Matt Murray excited for season

Indoor quarantine football

Tkachuk, Norris and White all returned to Ottawa more than a month before camp, and quarantined together in a townhouse owned by former Senators forward Mark Stone.

"The first week was great and by the second week we were kind of sick of each other," Norris says.

Along with a home gym set up by Senators staff, the young Sens played lots of video games and watched 'The Last Kingdom' TV series. When they got truly bored, they moved a couple of couches and played indoor, tackle football.

"Brady was the QB and me and Whitey were going one on one in the living room," Norris says.

"Thankfully, we didn't break anything or knock anything over. We were just trying to stay sane and have some fun in quarantine."

And while White's new muscle was apparent, Norris was just glad he didn't have to tackle the quarterback.

"Thankfully I didn't have to go against Chucky, because he's a lot bigger than both of us," Norris said.

White plays round with BizNasty

White was living on a golf course for the summer and played a lot of rounds, none more memorable than the one with the Spittin' Chiclets podcast crew.

"I got to play with Spittin' Chiclets, a little match with BizNasty, Paul Bissonnette and Ryan Whitney, it was a lot of fun," White says.

'Life-changing' for new dad Murray

Goaltender Matt Murray was back at work Tuesday after his wife, Christina, gave birth to a baby girl. The couple is keeping the name of the baby private.

"Obviously, it's a life-changing experience," Murray said on a Zoom call. "Any parent can tell you that. It's our first baby. They are both doing well. I couldn't be happier."

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Sportsnet.ca / 5 things we've learned from the early days of Maple Leafs training camp

Chris Johnston

TORONTO -- Where once a Sheldon Keefe practice was known for its accompanying music or a heavy focus on skills work, this Toronto Maple Leafs training camp has started off decidedly more old school.

It's officially bag skate SZN inside Ford Performance Centre.

"Yesterday we started with about 20 minutes without pucks and today we finished that way," said Jason Spezza, a veteran of a few different NHL coaching styles over the years.

Players were warned well in advance that they'd be greeted by a heightened focus on physicality and fitness here. They haven't so much as been put through a lower-paced specialty teams drill yet and shouldn't expect to see one during Wednesday's skate, either.

While we are basing these opinions on what we're hearing rather than seeing -- the Leafs are one of seven NHL teams that aren't currently granting reporters access to practices because of local health restrictions -- Keefe's fresh approach has emerged as one of the big storylines in the early days of camp.

No more Mr. Nice Guy.

The reason for the change is among the five most interesting things we've learned while monitoring Leafs camp from the parking lot:

Day #LeafsForever pic.twitter.com/gAKzhQQQze

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) January 6, 2021

1. What's gotten into Keefe?

The answer is nothing. Not really.

What's changed mostly is the circumstances, not the man himself. Keefe says he's always been fond of a demanding training camp, all the way back to when he was coaching the Pembroke Lumber Kings to five straight Central Canada Hockey League titles.

There was no opportunity to come in hot when he replaced Mike Babcock behind the Leafs bench in November 2019 because the team was skidding along at 9-10-4. His first time on the ice as head coach was for a morning skate held hours before a game in Arizona.

Hence the Kumbaya touch, which was a notable departure from how Babcock ran the show. Keefe's immediate goal was restoring energy and morale, and the training camp held before the playoff bubble this summer included some further guardrails because it was so focused on the upcoming series with Columbus.

This, finally, is an opportunity to put his true stamp on the program. And he's keeping the friendly 3-on-2 line rushes and puck play to a minimum.

"I always knew that we needed to make changes with our standards and our habits," said Keefe. "It was something we always talked about behind the scenes that we needed to sort of readjust things here, and it was going to take a reset and a training camp to do that. We went from sort of trying to patch holes, I guess you could say, to now really working towards setting a proper foundation and building from there."

No wonder he's so enthused by the response from the group. Spezza was smiling on a Zoom call while discussing the renewed focus on conditioning, saying "it's fun."

Zach Bogosian, who signed in Toronto fresh off his Stanley Cup win with Tampa, endorsed the approach as well: "A lot of drills are focused on compete level and I think to be an elite team in this league that's got to be No. 1 every single night."

Great for Spezza to have more players from his era on Maple Leafs

2. The new matchup/checking line

While we all got swept up by the revelation that 41-year-old Joe Thornton would start as a top-line left-winger with Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner — colleague Luke Fox had a good piece on that trio here — the more interesting decision came deeper down the depth chart.



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Keefe is an even-keeled sort by nature but copped to being “excited” about the potential for a new matchup line consisting of Ilya Mikheyev, Alexander Kerfoot and Zach Hyman.

While all of this is subject to change pending Kerfoot’s day-to-day status after leaving Tuesday’s practice with an injury, that group actually appeared to be the most firmly set in stone in the coach’s mind.

He even mentioned that he wanted to get a “long look” at them together. In Mikheyev-Kerfoot-Hyman, Keefe sees three players that are “relentless on the puck, that skate really well and have good defensive habits” — extremely high praise in coach speak.

They are trusted tone-setters who could become a safety blanket for an unusual regular season that will see Toronto face six opponents who happen to have some of the most dangerous individual talents in the world, from Connor McDavid to Leon Draisaitl to Elias Pettersson to Johnny Gaudreau to Patrik Laine to Mark Scheifele and on down the line.

It stands to reason that Mikheyev-Kerfoot-Hyman could be deployed in defensive situations against opposing stars, taking at least some of the heavy lifting from Matthews and John Tavares in Toronto’s top six.

That appears to be the initial plan, anyways. Pending good health.

What are Keefe’s expectations for Bogosian this season?

3. The new guys

Even though this is a short training camp, it won’t be a crash course in team-building.

A unique off-season has made it less necessary, with most of the Leafs having already been skating at the practice rink together for several weeks.

Alexander Barabanov came over from Russia in October while Mikko Lehtonen arrived from his stint with KHL Jokerit in November. They didn’t require name tags on the first day. Spezza feels like he already knows Lehtonen.

“He came in early, which is always a great sign when you have players coming from Europe,” said Spezza.

Even the better-known NHL veterans made it a priority to get into town. T.J. Brodie and Wayne Simmonds are locals, while Bogosian arrived a month ago and Jimmy Vesey moved two months back after having trouble adjusting to a new environment in Buffalo last season and enduring a difficult tenure there.

“What set the tone for my year in Buffalo was not getting off to a good start,” said Vesey. “I’ve come here early, I’ve put in the work to kind of try to eliminate as much of the adjustment period as possible. ... You know it’s been a lot of time off for me, I haven’t played a hockey game since March. I’ve come in here with a hungry mindset and I’m just going to try to keep that up.”

The only late arrival was Thornton, whose stint with HC Davos in the Swiss league stretched into December. And there aren’t too many players anywhere who don’t already feel like they know Jumbo.

Why Bogosian thinks D pairing with Mikko Lehtonen works so well

4. Blue-line battles

It’s easy to make too much of the fringes of a depth chart in training camp, especially with all of the unknowns about injuries (and potentially COVID) to come. Playing time tends to take care of itself over time.

But it was notable that Travis Dermott found himself in healthy scratch territory on the fourth pairing with Rasmus Sandin here, especially after dressing for all 56 games he was healthy for last season. You could interpret that as a step back at a time the 24-year-old is expected to be progressing in his career.

Keefe elected to unite newcomers Lehtonen and Bogosian ahead of him on the third pair and is asking for more consistency from Dermott’s game. He also expects him to compete to regain playing time.

“I think he’s as good a player as we have in the defensive zone with closing and puck pressure and his gap control and going back for pucks,” Keefe said of Dermott. “Those are really good, but we need to make sure that that’s consistent and that his play with the puck and play in other areas of the ice remains consistent.”

The Lehtonen-Bogosian pair hardly seems like a sure thing. Lehtonen turns 27 later this month and is an offensively-minded skater who hasn’t yet played a NHL game, while Bogosian is a rugged penalty-killer and stay-at-home type.

“I think he can jump into the rush. Obviously he has that offensive side of things,” Bogosian said of Lehtonen. “I’ll be there to play well defensively and move the puck up the ice to whether it’s him or we have a great group of forwards. Having a good first pass on this team goes a long way.”

Let’s allow this one to breathe a bit before reaching any conclusions.

Thornton & Simmonds providing more options for Maple Leafs’ power play

5. The world’s most expensive power play is no more... sort of

When the Leafs do get around to working on specialty teams later this week, it sounds like they’ll opt for balance over brute offensive force.

Last year’s top power-play unit featured forwards Matthews, Tavares, Marner and William Nylander skating with either Morgan Rielly or the departed Tyson Barrie, but they’ll be split up to start the 2020-21 campaign.

Keefe hinted that Thornton and Simmonds are both candidates for the revamped PP1 — presumably with Matthews, Marner and Rielly — which would leave Tavares, Nylander, Vesey, Spezza and Lehtonen as a possible PP2.

(These groupings are only projections. We’ll get a better sense of what Keefe is thinking in a couple days).

That setup would see less reliance on only one unit to score, which is an understandable approach after watching the PP success dry up as last year went along. Toronto connected on just 2-of-13 opportunities during its play-in series with Columbus in August.

“We’re going to establish two units from the start and look to build some chemistry there,” said Keefe. There’s always the option to revert back to top-heavy setup if need be.

“I think we feel confident with having the four forwards that we had last year playing together,” he added. “We feel comfortable with that group and we feel we can go to it at any time ... but we wanted to work at establishing two units here with the increased depth that we have now.”

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Training Camp Day 3: Zdeno Chara hits ice with Capitals

Emily Sadler

As we look ahead to the start of the shortened 2020-21 NHL season, which begins Jan. 13, we’re collecting news and notes from training camps around the league.



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Perry makes camp debut with Canadiens

The Montreal Canadiens welcomed their newest player to the ice on Tuesday, with forward Corey Perry making his camp practice debut with the Habs -- one of many jarring sights around the league as we see players skate with their new clubs. The 35-year-old skated on a line opposite Michael Frolik and centred by Ryan Poehling.

First look at Corey Perry as a member of the @CanadiensMTL pic.twitter.com/Bc3uccaGMK

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) January 5, 2021

Perry spent the 2019-20 season with the Dallas Stars, where he proved to be not just an effective thorn in opponents' sides during the playoffs but also a clutch offensive weapon as the Stars went all the way to the Stanley Cup Final. He signed a one-year, \$750,000 contract with the Canadiens on Dec. 28. A longtime member of the Anaheim Ducks, this is the Peterborough native and Team Canada veteran's first time playing for a Canadian NHL club.

Corey est là.

Corey's here. #GoHabsGo pic.twitter.com/DdJ4AK1Soj

— Canadiens Montréal (@CanadiensMTL) January 5, 2021

Tyler Johnson poised for rebound season?

Listed under "things you love to see:" a happy Tyler Johnson hitting the ice with his Tampa Bay Lightning teammates. A fresh start in familiar territory for the 30-year-old forward after a stressful year of uncertainty.

Johnson's name has been run throughout the rumour mill for the better part of the past year, his declining numbers and \$5-million cap hit a tough combination for Tampa to navigate in a flat-cap world. An extended time on the trade block yielded no deals, resulting in the Lightning placing Johnson on waivers back in October. There, he went unclaimed, his time with Tampa Bay ticking down and nothing but uncertainty ahead.

Tampa GM Julien BriseBois was able to create some much-coveted cap flexibility without moving Johnson, trading Braydon Coburn and Cedric Paquette to Ottawa and taking on LTIR players, and Nikita Kucherov's absence to start the season, while a tough blow for the team, means he's got \$9.5 million extra to start the season.

According to reporters onsite, the feeling amid the Stanley Cup champs is optimistic with regards to Johnson's ability to seize this new opportunity.

Pavelski's back at camp

If the Dallas Stars are to regroup for another Stanley Cup campaign, veteran forward Joe Pavelski will have to be at the top of his game. The 36-year-old, who signed a lucrative three-year pact with the Stars in July 2019, hit the ice on Tuesday for the first time this year after missing the first day of practice yesterday. Per reports, Pavelski's arrival was held up by some pending medical results and listed as day-to-day.

Keefe keeping focus on conditioning

Contrary to convention, this upcoming NHL season will be more of a sprint than a marathon. Toronto Maple Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe is making sure his players are ready to keep pace:

Keefe indicated in his first camp media availability that he'd be prioritizing conditioning during this shortened camp. There's no room for rust in a 56-game season.

Keefe also said forward Alex Kerfoot suffered an injury after getting banged up in practice, and will be listed as day-to-day. It's unlikely he'll skate Wednesday.

Pride on the line in Edmonton

With the gold medal matchup between Canada and the U.S. just hours away in Edmonton, the Oilers are sporting their nations' colours and showing their support.

Frenemies.

: @EdmontonOilers pic.twitter.com/0qjlrRbUlt

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) January 5, 2021

Around the league, plenty of players were asked about their expectations heading into the big game:

"I've been hoping for a Canada/US game right from the start."

Mark Scheifele on the excitement of a Canada/USA Gold Medal Game and the wagers between teammates. pic.twitter.com/U4ziYDUwLd

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) January 5, 2021

Chara joins Capitals

A big development in Washington: Zdeno Chara is officially joining the team on Tuesday for the first time since signing there last week. The veteran rearguard and longtime Bruins captain is set to hit the ice, but won't join the main group until Wednesday's skate.

Avert your eyes, Bruins fans.

Hoffman impressing his teammates

Among the surprising signings this off-season -- and with Chara going to Washington and Hall headed to Buffalo, there were many -- Mike Hoffman joining the St. Louis Blues on a PTO might have been the most startling development. There's a contract coming, of course, and one befitting of a 30-goal sniper -- we quickly learned that the PTO is just a formality before the Blues can take advantage of the LTIR cap space.

Actual tryout or not, Hoffman's wasting no time impressing his new teammates:

Puljujarvi's return marks fresh start for both sides

The return of Jesse Puljujarvi has been a big talking point in Edmonton since his departure in 2018. Now that he's officially back, having signed a two-year pact with the Oilers to make his NHL return, all eyes will be on the Finnish forward as the two sides mend their relationship and look to move on from the long separation.

Puljujarvi hit the ice with his Oilers teammates on Monday, his first time practicing with the club since 2018. He spoke to the media on Tuesday, saying he's "really liked" being back:

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers greats bid fond farewells to legendary John Muckler

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — It may have been Day 3 of training camp Tuesday, but in the Edmonton Oilers' world, it was Day 1 without former head coach John Muckler, who died Monday at age 86.

"Just a really special, unique man," said a solemn Wayne Gretzky, on 630 CHED radio.

Muckler was Glen Sather's assistant coach on the 1984 and 1985 Stanley Cup winning teams, and was elevated to co-coach on the 1987 and 1988 Cup winners. On the post-Gretzky, 1990 Stanley Cup champion team, Muckler was the head coach.



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That 1990 team was perhaps Muckler's finest work, after being hired by Sather to coach in Wichita of the Central League in 1982.

"John ran a strict, smart team that played the same kind of style that I wanted to use in Edmonton," Sather said in a conference call on Tuesday. "He was (nine years), older than me, a little more mature, and sometimes a little more patient than me.

"But he had one focus in mind, and that was to do it the way we wanted the players to play. The players respected that, and it made my job a lot easier."

While Sather was the psychologist and pusher of buttons on those dynasty Oilers teams, Muckler — along with fellow staff member Ted Green, who died in October of 2019 — brought a technical aspect to the Oilers game plan. Together, the three had all the ground covered when it came to maximizing a roster that had perhaps more pure talent than any ever to lace up skates in the NHL.

"John Muckler and Teddy Green's contributions were as important as any of the great players on those teams. I can attest to it. I lived it," said former Oiler Kevin Lowe, one of seven players from that dynasty to enter the Hockey Hall of Fame.

"The misunderstanding was, we don't win all those championships without being such a superbly technical team," Lowe continued. "In those days, sure, you could get away with winning (regular season) games without being as technical. But after 1983, we became a video-trained, highly technical hockey team. We won Cups because we had talent, but you don't win without having more than that."

An example: The Oilers simply could not win at the tight-cornered band box that was the old Boston Garden, even when they were winning their first two Cups. But in the '88 and '90 Stanley Cup Finals, Edmonton won four of five games in Boston, with the fifth one being ruled a tie when the fights went out and the score was 3-3.

Muckler's brilliant coaching is credited with providing the game plan that could beat the Bruins in their own quirky arena.

"There was never a day when I went to the rink and I didn't leave without the confidence that we didn't have the right game plan to win the next game," said Lowe. Even after a bad loss, "You'd go to practice, and you'd leave there going, 'We're going to be all right.'"

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

Pom Poms Out

In their post-practice, media Zoom calls, Caleb Jones and Kailer Yamamoto appeared wearing Team USA jerseys while Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Darnell Nurse donned the red and white of Team Canada. All four represented their country at the U-20 tournament.

"We were able to beat Canada in a shootout in Montreal (in 2017)," Jones recalled. "It's probably the most memorable game I'll have in my career."

Jones' career has reached the point where a full-time job in the NHL awaits. Seth's little brother has been knocking on the door in Edmonton for a couple of seasons now, and with Oscar Klefbom — another left-handed defenceman — out for the season with arthritis in his shoulder, there's a job waiting for Jones.

A year ago, Ethan Bear whizzed past him on the depth chart. It sounds like he won't let that happen again.

"I didn't come in camp last year with the start I wanted, and I ended up getting sent down real quick," said Jones, who is 24 with 60 NHL games played. "This year ... I knew there was some opportunity. I wanted to come in, impress people, and show that I'm ready to take more."

As a young player you're just trying not to make too many mistakes. Now, it's time to simply play the game that got him here.

"I'm not worried about making mistakes," Jones said. "I just want to make plays and have a good impact on the game."

He's been paired with the stay-at-home Adam Larsson early in camp. Of course, Larsson traditionally pairs with Klefbom.

Pairs, Not Three of a Kind

Head coach Dave Tippett says that his lines won't be so fluid because training camp is so short this year.

"You're looking at pairs," he said, listing off the pairs he'd like to see work up front. That's Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Connor McDavid; Leon Draisaitl and Kailer Yamamoto; Kyle Turris and Jesse Puljujarvi.

"I like Puljujarvi and Turris so far," Tippett confirmed. "We'll tinker, through one more full day of practice and two full scrimmages. I would say with a short camp you're trying to find some continuity, but the reality is you probably won't know until you're a few days into the season where all the parts fit best."

Puljujarvi is getting some early love from his new head coach, who spoke with him about leaving Finland and giving the NHL another try.

"I think there's a good hockey player there," Tippett said. "He was a young player, probably thrown into some situations a little bit early, and he struggled with it. He talked very openly. He put it on himself that he didn't handle (his first NHL stint) very well. His expectations were higher than they should have been.

"He's matured a lot. His English is a lot better. He's a good player who should be playing in our league."

Nugent-Hopkins was asked if Puljujarvi had to clear the air in the dressing room, after walking out on the Oilers when he fled to Finland and Oulu Karpat.

"I don't really think it needs to be touched on," Nugent-Hopkins said. "He's out here, working hard. He's put in the time and worked on his English a lot. He's speaking a lot better now. His attitude is, he wants to be part of this group and we're excited to have him.

"He's a big kid with all the talent in the world. We're excited to help him figure it all out."

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TSN.CA / Canada aims to complete remarkable World Juniors journey

Over the past 51 days, Team Canada has developed a special bond and tonight they have a chance to go down in history as one of the greatest World Junior teams ever, Mark Masters writes.

By Mark Masters

TSN Hockey Reporter Mark Masters reports from the World Junior Hockey Championship in Edmonton. Team Canada held an off-ice meeting and media availability on Tuesday ahead of the gold-medal final against Team USA.

This is the longest a Team Canada has ever been together and tonight they have a chance to go down in history as one of the greatest World Junior teams ever.



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"You obviously look at the skill the team has but, beyond that, over the past 51 days we've been together we've developed a bond within the group and that's special," said defenceman Jamie Drysdale. "I can honestly say that all these guys are my brothers now."

Team Canada has not trailed for a second at the tournament and has yet to allow a five-on-five goal while outscoring the opposition 41-4.

"A big part of it is the time we've spent together," said forward Cole Perfetti. "We've been together since mid-November. Even through the [18 days in] quarantine we were doing a lot of stuff together, a lot of team bonding. At a normal World Juniors you see guys come in in mid-December and have two weeks to get ready and we had a month and a half to get ready for this and we used that to our advantage. We've come together nicely and we're a real tight group now and I think that's real big for our chemistry and success so far."

Canada smothered the Russians right from puck drop on Monday. If they replicate that performance tonight, can they be beaten?

"That's a good question," said centre Quinton Byfield with a smile. "No, I don't think so. We had an unbelievable game and we need to keep building off each game."

The job is not done and head coach Andre Tourigny was channeling his inner Phil Jackson this morning reminding everyone that despite all the hard work so far "it doesn't mean a thing without the ring."

"I like their feeling this morning," Tourigny said of his players. "We're composed. Nobody's overexcited or whatever. We're in the right place mentally right now."

Tourigny served as an assistant coach at four previous World Juniors, suffering heartache in Saskatoon in 2010 when the United States beat Canada in overtime of the gold-medal game. He was there one year later when Canada blew a third-period lead in Buffalo against the Russians. He was in Ufa, Russia, during the NHL lockout in 2013 when the last Canadian "Dream Team" failed to reach the podium.

And Tourigny was also on the bench last year in Ostrava, Czech Republic, when Canada stormed back from being down 3-1 in the third period to beat Russia in the final.

"A big reason why we had success is we stayed with it and never changed anything whatever the adversity," Tourigny recalled. "If we start to want to enjoy the moment now, we're in trouble. We're in big, big trouble. For us, it's to stay in the present. We have a lifetime to enjoy that game and a lifetime to remember that game."

Familiarity between USA and Canada promises an instant classic

Most of the players in tonight's gold medal game between Canada and the United States have battled at the under 17s and the under 18s. TSN's Mark Masters has more on how the familiarity between the two teams should provide another classic confrontation.

Standing in the way of Team Canada tonight is Team USA.

"What else can you ask for," said Byfield. "You're playing the U.S. in the gold-medal game. It's probably the deepest rivalry in hockey ... It was pretty tough falling asleep last night just thinking about the game and all the situations and just dreaming about everything that could happen."

Team Canada has six players back from last year, including Byfield although the Newmarket, Ont., native didn't get a shift in the gold-medal game. He's been waiting a year for this chance.

"I'm definitely excited to get my first shift and get involved right away, get a hit and make a play or something and then a quick change," he said. "Want to get that first shift under my belt and I think the rest of the game will come to me after that."

Byfield didn't play in the final last year, but he was taking notes.

"I had the best seat in the house," he said. "It was unbelievable to watch the comeback and how much effort we put in and all the sacrifices we made in that game. The drive that we had to come back was unbelievable to watch."

After watching last year's final, Byfield eager for his first shift tonight

Quinton Byfield is a returning player from last year's gold medal winning team, however he didn't suit up for the final against Russia. He joins Mark Masters to talk about his anticipation for his first shift, why they need a repeat performance of their semi-final and if he's been able to get any rest in the last 24 hours.

The fashionable Byfield didn't have any special outfit in mind for tonight.

"Honestly, I feel like people are expecting me to bring something out, but I only brought three suits and I've shown them all off," he said. "I'll wear the one I wore last game and I'll go with that."

His good friend Connor McMichael was the one making a statement with his attire on Tuesday morning, sporting red and white socks with Maple Leafs on them. On the bottom of each sock it says, "Good Luck Sock."

The London Knights sniper said the socks were a gift from his girlfriend and he also wore them on Monday when he scored in the semifinal win.

McMichael has now scored in all five knockout-stage games he's played at the World Juniors.

CA Connor McMichael wearing his "Good Luck Socks" today

A gift from his girlfriend

Also wore them yesterday #WorldJuniors pic.twitter.com/Rfl0XugmxJ

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) January 5, 2021

It's going to be a late night on the Rock.

"I'm sure the whole island will be up and rolling," said Bay Roberts, N.L., native Dawson Mercer. "It's an exciting time with the support back home. It's a late start time for them at 11 p.m., but the next morning I'm sure they'll be happy with the outcome (smile)."

Last year, Mercer played a fourth-line role and was roommates with Akil Thomas, who also filled a depth role before emerging as the hero in the gold-medal game. In an interview with TSN last month, Thomas predicted big things for Mercer in Edmonton.

"I think he's got an important goal this year," Thomas said. "I'm calling it now."

Told about that prediction this morning, Mercer made it clear he's comfortable in the big moment.

"I love playing in big games like this," the Chicoutimi Sagueneens forward said. "Every player wants to be put in this situation. When I get my opportunity, I'll do my job every time I step on the ice. I want to make sure I have a positive impact."

Rivals from the Rock: Mercer, Newhook bring Newfoundland pride to World Juniors

For the first time since 1992, two players from Newfoundland have made it to the World Juniors. And Alex Newhook and Dawson Mercer helped lead the charge for Canada in the opening win combining for four goals and three assists. The pair actually grew up as rivals. Mercer is from tiny Bay Roberts and Newhook from St. John's, but now the "Baymen" and the "Townie" are reunited and feeling the love from back home.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Boston College teammates Alex Newhook and Spencer Knight will be facing off tonight. Does Newhook have an idea for moves that will work on the Team USA goalie?

"I've got a little bit of a playbook, being with him for two years, so we'll see how it goes," the St. John's native said with a smile.

Knight laughed that off saying he wasn't sure what Newhook had in mind. The pair have been in touch during the World Juniors via the Boston College group chat.

"He's an awesome guy," Knight said. "Everyone loves him and he brings a lot of energy to the lineup at BC and so that's what I know he's probably bringing to their lineup."

After missing a game, Newhook admits he had some pent up energy

Alex Newhook admits he had some extra pent up energy to start their game against Russia after he missed their quarter-final and it resulted in a goal on his first shift. He also talks about how he'll turn his focus to the gold medal game on Tuesday.

Team USA may have a source of information on Team Canada goalie Devon Levi. The Northeastern University freshman leads the tournament with a .975 save percentage.

"I know one of our guys here, Sam Colangelo, is roommates with him [at school] and says he's a really good goalie," Knight noted.

Nobody has been able to solve Levi at this year's tournament.

"Every game feels the same," Levi said. "I try to play every game the same way whether it's a Junior A game, a midget game or one of these games and I've been able to be consistent, because I've been able to feel consistent going into the games."

Levi, a seventh round pick of the Florida Panthers, listens to music quite a bit on game days, including during intermissions. What's on his playlist?

"I listen to songs that I've been listening to throughout my hockey career," he said. "Just some good music to get me pumped and get my mind off things. Some of the songs I've been listening to since my midget days and they sort of bring me back to times when I played well and I guess it sort of gets me into a zone and fired up."

The rest of the team steers clear of Levi on game days, including Tourigny.

"I stay as far away as I can from this guy," the coach told TSN's Ryan Rishaug. "He's focused. He's in his bubble."

Panthers goalie prospects Levi, Knight face off with gold on the line

Canada's Devon Levi and USA's Spencer Knight were both drafted by the Florida Panthers, but will be on opposite sides tonight as the Canadians and Americans battle for gold. Gord Miller and Ray Ferraro have more on the matchup in the crease tonight.

It's been mostly radio silence between Wisconsin Badgers teammates Cole Caufield and Dylan Holloway during the World Juniors with one exception. The Team Canada forward sent birthday wishes to the Team USA sniper when he turned 20 a couple days ago.

"Going back to Wisconsin one of us isn't going to be too happy," Holloway said.

Does he have any trash talk in mind when he's on the ice with Caufield today?

"I got some stuff that I could throw out there, yeah," he said with a smile. "Probably nothing I could say on camera though."

Holloway ready for the 'trash talking' with Wisconsin teammate Caufield

Dylan Holloway plays alongside American Cole Caufield for the Wisconsin Badgers, but the Canadian says the two have had minimal contact with one another since the start of the tournament. Now they get set to square off in tonight's gold medal game and Holloway says he has some trash talk ready for his 'enemy'.

The championship game will pit the top scorers at the World Juniors – Canada's Dylan Cozens and Trevor Zegras of the United States – against each other. They are tied with 16 points apiece entering the final day of the event.

"Dylan's an unbelievable player," said Zegras, "Kind of been going at it with him and that group for a long time now so it'd be nice to stick it to him and win this thing."

What's the key for Team USA tonight?

"A lot of energy," Zegras said. "Get the puck low, grind'em and put the puck in the back of the net."

Cozens, who scored Canada's first goal in the gold-medal game last year, wasn't available to the media this morning.

Gold medal game to feature a battle of the tournament's best in Cozens vs. Zegras

There are a ton of storylines to watch entering the gold medal showdown between Canada and USA, but none more intriguing than the matchup between the top two forwards in the tournament: Dylan Cozens vs. Trevor Zegras. Bob McKenzie joins James Duthie to assess the highly-anticipated clash, and weigh in on another interesting matchup between the pipes.

Team Canada winger Jakob Pelletier was at it again last night. After setting up Cozens for an empty-net goal, the Val d'Or Foreurs winger leaned over to kiss his linemate's helmet at the bench. Pelletier did the same thing to Holloway after he assisted on his goal against the Finns on New Year's Eve.

Tourigny was asked who, other than the always chatty Bowen Byram, had stepped up as a vocal leader.

"It's Pelletier hands down," Tourigny said. "He's the only one who can challenge Bo in terms of being vocal. He talks a lot, brings a lot of energy and is positive and really focused. He brings a lot in the room."

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TSN.CA / Keefe keeps intensity high at Leafs camp

When Sheldon Keefe was named head coach of the Maple Leafs in November 2019, the fragile team he inherited could hardly handle any more tough love. Toronto wasn't even in a playoff spot at the time, holding a paltry 9-10-4 record while teetering on the edge of total collapse.

By Kristen Shilton

The Maple Leafs held their second day of on-ice training camp sessions at Ford Performance Centre

When Sheldon Keefe was named head coach of the Maple Leafs in November 2019, the fragile team he inherited could hardly handle any more tough love. Toronto wasn't even in a playoff spot at the time,



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holding a paltry 9-10-4 record while teetering on the edge of total collapse.

Back then, Keefe's primarily goal was to keep the Leafs above water. Now, it's to see them soar. So in his first full training camp as an NHL head coach, which finished off its second day of on-ice sessions at Ford Performance Centre on Tuesday, Keefe has kept the pressure and intensity as high as possible on his players.

"I've always tried to make training camp one of the more, if not the most, difficult phases of the season," Keefe told reporters on a Zoom call Tuesday. "Coming in mid-season [last year] with a team that was reeling and needed to find its way [when] morale and energy were low, coming in and doing this type of [intense] approach, I don't think would have served team morale very well. I didn't even consider that as an option at the time. But I think we're in a good place there as a team now, and I knew that we needed to make changes with our standards and our habits and all the things that we do."

Keefe always intended to address those missing links, but found it nearly impossible between one-off practices and playing games every other day. He never stopped talking behind the scenes about what would eventually be done, though.

"We [knew we] needed to sort of readjust things here and it was going to take a reset in a training camp to be able to do that," he said. "So we went from trying to patch holes, I guess you could say, to now really working towards setting a proper foundation and building from there. I just felt that the principles of the training camps I've had in the past, I need to stick with those – regardless of whether it's a short camp, long camp; we were going to get our work done."

This is the most traditional preseason Keefe has run in several years, going back to his days as head coach for the OHL's Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds from 2012-15. Unlike during his subsequent tenure with the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies from 2015-19, Keefe previously had his club's entire complement of players to work with from the start, just as he does now. Keefe took great pains to warn players throughout the off-season that when training camp came around, they'd better be ready to push.

"They told us all summer that conditioning was a priority," said Jason Spezza. "They prepped us with emails and follow-up phone calls to remind us throughout this break and even leading up to it that camp was going to be very difficult, it was going to be very physical and they wanted to get us up and running quickly. Yesterday we started with about 20 minutes without pucks and today we finished that way, so lots of skating, but it's great."

With no media present to watch the sessions due to provincial restrictions related to COVID-19, Keefe has done his best to describe what it's like out on the ice. So far, it's been an impressive showing.

"We asked a lot of them today; it was a long practice," he acknowledged. "We covered a lot of different things. Energy is really good though. That's the real standout for me after two days is just the energy and the vibe around the team, lots of positivity and lots of chatter. Our practices have got a lot more positive noise to them, which is very good. And then that energy I've seen so far is transferring to the drills and the competitiveness."

At some point on Tuesday, forward Alexander Kerfoot was forced to leave after getting "a little banged up" according to Keefe. The Leafs will wait and see what Kerfoot's status is following further evaluation, but Keefe is calling him "day-to-day" at this point and doesn't expect he'll skate on Wednesday.

Keefe has also opted not to do any special teams work to this point in camp. That won't come about until later in the week, after Toronto has a chance to scrimmage on Wednesday.

"We made the decision that we wanted the focus to be on our five-on-five play here for the first few days," Keefe explained. "Just because we knew what we wanted to get done in terms of the demands and the physicality

and the pace that we want to establish in practice and that was the priority. Special teams generally slow down the practice; you're only using some guys and the pace is not nearly the same."

Keefe hasn't made any final decisions on power play groupings, but did admit the off-season additions of Joe Thornton and Wayne Simmonds have him considering either player for a spot on the Leafs top unit with Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, John Tavares and William Nylander.

In the month since Mikko Lehtonen arrived in Toronto from the KHL's Jokerit Helsinki, the 26-year-old has established himself as not only one of the team's hardest-working players, but also its most serious.

"I like joking around with him, just to make him smile," said Lehtonen's defence partner, Zach Bogosian. "He's really determined, he's really focused; you can tell that and it's good to see. We've built some great chemistry."

"He's very focused and hardworking," agreed fellow blueliner Jake Muzzin. "You see him in the gym, and he's in there early, he's in there late. He's getting ready, he's asking questions, he's playing hard in practice, he's making the right plays. I'm excited to see him play and look forward to watching his success grow here."

Lehtonen signed a one-year contract with the Leafs in May 2019, but because of COVID-19 never made the journey from Finland to North America until last November. Toronto has high hopes for its rookie off the hop though, especially after he posted 17 points (eight goals, nine assists) in 17 games for Jokerit this year.

"He's looked good even before camp," said Keefe. "We want to give him every opportunity to get confident and just try to ease that transition so he can feel like himself and get out here and play as quickly as possible."

So far, Lehtonen's feeling good in his new surroundings. And if anything, he's glad not to have tried making the jump to an NHL team before now.

"I think I'm a way better player than at 20 or 22 years old," he said. "But for me now I feel like I know my strengths and what I'm good at. I use those strengths and I just feel right now I'm good to be here and try my best. I'll use my skating and quick passes and shoot the puck to the net and also defend well."

Like most European players, Lehtonen expects there to be a continuing learning curve on the NHL's smaller sheet of ice. Fortunately, he's found many allies around the Leafs' room who are happy to help him get comfortable.

"There's a lot of new faces, new things for me, but it's been good so far, and I like it a lot here," he said. "I think the game is a little bit faster, but for me it's not a big deal. Also the other players are good here, too. It's the best league in the world, so it should be like that."

Jimmy Vesey never got his game off the ground with the Buffalo Sabres last year, and he's using that disappointment as fuel in his first camp with the Leafs.

"What set the tone for my year in Buffalo was not getting off to a good start," he said. "So I've come here early, and I've put in the work to try to eliminate as much of the adjustment period as possible. I think I will learn from that and draw from that experience just in the sense that, it's a 56-game season and we've talked as a team [about how] there's not a lot of time to have off nights. It's going to be a sprint, and we have to be ready from the drop of the puck. That goes the same for me personally as well."

Keefe is certainly giving Vesey ample opportunity early, slotting him onto the second line with Tavares and Nylander. Back when he signed a one-year, \$900,000 contract with Toronto last fall, Vesey had hoped for that kind of chance to contribute.

"I knew they had some departures with [Kasper] Kapanen and [Andreas] Johnsson being traded," Vesey said. "So when I signed I thought it was a



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pretty loaded forward group [I could be joining]. Any time you step on the ice, there's going to be skill on the ice with you. That was the biggest thing for me, just having a chance to play anywhere [in the lineup] and be with great guys."

Little did Vesey know at the time, but he'd also soon be sharing a dressing room with his childhood idol. Growing up in the Boston area, Vesey loved watching Thornton (as then-captain of the Bruins) and even wore No. 19 for a time in homage to the veteran.

"Just to be on the same team as him and see him on an everyday basis, it's unreal," said Vesey. "I'm trying not to act like an idiot in front of him. He's obviously got a great resume and when he walks into a room, you know he's in there and he commands a lot of respect. I've been quiet, just observing him and learning as much from him as I can. Everyone's talking about how positive he is, how he carries himself and I think that's something that can really rub off on the team and rub off on me especially as well."

In a season where the Leafs will see just six other teams over the course of a 56-game slate in the North Division, there's a certain attitude they'll need to adopt pretty quickly – or so says a Stanley Cup champion.

"It comes down to a battle of will at the end of the night," said Muzzin. "Who wants it the most? Most times, it's the team that wants it the most that'll come out on top. There are adjustments; it's a chess match. They're going to do this; we got to do that. If they do this, we got to do that. There's certain changes that have to be made when your heads up like that again and again and again."

Rather than be daunted by the uncertainty of their new schedule, Spezza said the Leafs should embrace this potentially once-in-a-lifetime experience with their Canadian counterparts.

"I think it's going to be really fun. It kind of gives a playoff feel to see these little mini-series," he said. "The coaches are going to definitely break down video a little more and make adjustments to other teams. But it's kind of cool to play the same teams over and over, and with an all-Canadian Division there'll be lots of eyes on us. I welcome the challenge."

Players also knew sacrifices would have to be made in order for this NHL season to proceed amid a pandemic, and it's started to sink in just how restrictive the next few months will be on their day-to-day lives.

"You just try to keep yourselves to home and the rink at home, and on the road you try to keep yourself in the rink and just the hotel," said Spezza. "You don't really leave the hotel. You can just get yourself ready and keep your distance when you can. Around the dressing room, we've been very diligent. They have lots of people around here reminding us to keep our masks on and it becomes second nature, so like anything we'll adapt. If it gets us playing hockey we'll do it."

—

Leafs lines at training camp:

Forwards

Thornton-Matthews-Marner

Vesey-Tavares-Nylander

Mikheyev-Kerfoot-Hyman

Barabanov-Spezza-Simmonds

Defence

Rielly-Brodie

Muzzin-Holl

Lehtonen-Bogosian

Sandin-Dermott

Goalies

Andersen

Campbell

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TSN.CA / Canucks Camp Day Two Report

Jeff Paterson recaps the first day of on-ice action at Canucks camp

By Jeff Paterson

The Vancouver Canucks hit the ice for their first practice sessions of training camp Monday at Rogers Arena. The team skated in two groups with Travis Green and the full coaching staff on the ice for both sessions.

With just over a week until the Canucks open their 2021 regular season in Edmonton on Wednesday January 13th, Green conceded that it was fair to read into many of the line combinations and defensive pairings he put together for the opening day of camp. With that in mind, it was notable that Brock Boeser was on the right side with Elias Pettersson and JT Miller. It was also worth noting that Nils Hoglander was placed on right wing with Bo Horvat and Tanner Pearson as the Swedish rookie got a chance to debut in a top six role. Other takeaways from the player deployment on the first day included the reunion of Antoine Roussel-Adam Gaudette-Zack MacEwen – a trio that played together for a couple of weeks prior to the COVID break last March.

As with every Canucks camp, there are always questions about Jake Virtanen who found himself alongside Brandon Sutter and Tyler Motte in what could very well function as a third line for the Canucks to open the season. Sutter spent most of last season as a winger, but shifted back to the middle to open this camp. That left the likes of Jay Beagle, Loui Eriksson, Sven Baertschi and newcomer Jayce Hawryluk along with hopefuls Kole Lind, Justin Bailey and Marc Michaelis outside of the top 12 forward positions on Day 1.

On defense, Nate Schmidt skated on the right side of a pairing with Alex Edler while Olli Juolevi was partnered with veteran Tyler Myers – again both of those could be featured in the team's opening night line-up. With Travis Hamonic in quarantine and out of the picture for the time being, Jalen Chatfield was afforded the opportunity to skate with Quinn Hughes. Chatfield could be functioning as a place holder until Hamonic can join the group later in camp. Other pairings of note: Jack Rathbone and Jordie Benn while Brogan Rafferty was alongside Josh Teves.

As expected, the first day of camp was strenuous and ended with both groups being put through their paces with a rigorous skate. Because of many new faces to the organization, Travis Green spent a good deal of Monday's sessions at the whiteboard in teacher mode ensuring that everybody in camp was on the same page and learning his systems.

The groups will remain intact for the first three days of camp which means these are the probable line-ups for the first full camp scrimmage which is expected to take place Wednesday evening. On Tuesday, the groups will hit the ice in reverse order with Group B scheduled to start the day at 10:30am followed by Group A.

GROUP A

Miller-Pettersson-Boeser

Motte-Sutter-Virtanen



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Gadjovich-Graovac-Lockwood

Eriksson-Beagle

Edler-Schmidt

Rathbone-Benn

Sautner-Brisebois

Woo

Holtby/DiPietro

GROUP B

Pearson-Horvat-Hoglander

Roussel-Gaudette-MacEwen

Baertschi-Michaelis-Bailey

Lind-Hawryluk

Hughes-Chatfield

Juolevi-Myers

Teves-Rafferty

Eliot

Demko/Kielly

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USA TODAY / NHL reveals new surprising new (sponsored) division names

Jimmy Hascup

First came the advertisements on helmets. Now comes the sponsors attached to division names in this realigned NHL season.

The league announced Tuesday the official division names for the 2021 season, and each of them are joined by a corporate sponsor for the first time in history.

The divisions are as follows: Scotia NHL® North Division, Honda NHL® West Division, Discover NHL® Central Division and MassMutual NHL® East Division.

According to ESPN, the selling of naming rights to its divisions is "viewed internally as a one-year-only campaign."

As the league gets set for a Jan. 13 start to an abbreviated, 56-game season, it has also realigned to limit travel during the pandemic, especially as Canada closed its border. During this season, teams will only play others in the same division, often multiple times in a row.

The NHL also announced recently that it would allow advertisements on player helmets. ESPN reported 13 teams have announced those sponsors.

According to Forbes, sales for tickets, suites, sponsorships, concessions, and parking account for more than 70% of total revenue usually. However, last season, the league played 15% of its regular season with fans, per Forbes, and all of its playoffs. The league is starting without fans this season.

Forbes said that the average NHL team value fell 2% (to \$653 million) and league revenue dropped 14% (to \$4.4 billion) during the 2019-20 campaign.

► The Scotia NHL® North Division is comprised of the Calgary Flames, Edmonton Oilers, Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators, Toronto Maple Leafs, Vancouver Canucks and Winnipeg Jets.

► The Honda NHL® West Division includes the Anaheim Ducks, Arizona Coyotes, Colorado Avalanche, Los Angeles Kings, Minnesota Wild, San Jose Sharks, St. Louis Blues and Vegas Golden Knights.

► The Discover NHL® Central Division consists of the Carolina Hurricanes, Chicago Blackhawks, Columbus Blue Jackets, Dallas Stars, Detroit Red Wings, Florida Panthers, Nashville Predators and Tampa Bay Lightning.

► The MassMutual NHL® East Division has the Boston Bruins, Buffalo Sabres, New Jersey Devils, New York Islanders, New York Rangers, Philadelphia Flyers, Pittsburgh Penguins and Washington Capitals.

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