



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 7, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes' Brett Pesce eager to play again after 'bummer' of missing 2020 playoffs

By Chip Alexander

Rod Brind'Amour had a lot on his mind on the night of Feb. 22, 2020.

It was before the coronavirus pandemic caused the world to all but stop. There was still hockey being played, and the Carolina Hurricanes were in Toronto facing the Maple Leafs.

Brind'Amour, the Canes coach, watched as starting goalie James Reimer left with an injury. Then, goalie Petr Mrazek. Suddenly, in an OMG moment, a 42-year-old emergency backup goalie named David Ayres was entering the game for the Canes.

But Brind'Amour was facing another serious, pressing matter that night. Defenseman Brett Pesce had left the game with a shoulder injury, after a seemingly innocuous play.

"Just an innocent play. My shoulder came out," Pesce said Wednesday on a media call. "I dislocated it two years ago and opted not to have surgery and just rehab it and just hope it would hold up."

It didn't hold up. The Canes already had lost defenseman Dougie Hamilton in January to a broken leg. Now, Pesce.

Although the Canes won the game with Ayres the unexpected hero in net, Pesce needed surgery. Later, when the Canes prepared for the NHL postseason, Mrazek, Reimer and Hamilton all were good to go. But not Pesce.

For Pesce, that stung, deeply. It only added to his eagerness to get back on the ice this year.

"Really excited to be back with everybody," Pesce said. "It was a long anticipated wait for me, especially getting an extra few months off."

Pesce said he had planned to rejoin the team in the Toronto bubble had the Canes been able to beat the Boston Bruins in the best-of-seven first-round series in the 2020 Stanley Cup playoffs. But that was not to be with the Bruins winning in five games.

"It was a bummer," Pesce said. "Missing the playoffs took a toll on me even more so, because when you have an opportunity to compete for the Stanley Cup, that's why everyone plays the game. So that hurt."

And Brind'Amour and the Canes, too. Pesce's game might seem a bit understated, and he might not draw the NHL-wide attention of a Hamilton or Jacob Slavin, but his grittiness and solid, effective play hardly go unnoticed by his coaches or teammates.

"People, I think, take 'Pesc' for granted about how good he is," forward Jordan Martinook said on the media call. "His offensive game is starting to show, too. Being able to jump into

the play and create offense is probably something people don't think about when they think of 'Pesc,' but it's definitely come a long way in the two years I've been here."

Pesce, who played 61 games last season before the injury, was averaging almost 22 minutes a game in ice time and his average of 3:16 shorthanded time per game led the team. That's where he's most valuable. But he had four goals and 14 assists and a plus-7 rating.

"He's an elite defender to me," Brind'Amour said. "When you don't have him, you notice it. He does such a good job at what he does. There's offense there, too. He's a real smart player."

Off the ice, Martinook said Pesce is "one of the guys who keeps it light and has fun."

"He's always smiling when he comes to the rink," Martinook said. "You'll get that kind of New York side to him where he gets in your face and chirps. That's why everybody draws to him. He's happy but he can throw jabs with the best of them. He's just smooth and steady and that's how he is in the room, too."

PESCE PAIRED WITH SKJEI IN CAMP

In the Canes' first three practices of training camp, Pesce has been paired with Brady Skjei. A right-handed shooter, Pesce gives Brind'Amour a solid second D pairing behind Slavin and Hamilton.

Pesce, a Tarrytown, New York, native, was injured two days before Skjei was traded to the Canes from the New York Rangers and it was one of the reasons for the move. But he likes the fit with Skjei, who also is 26 and at 6-3 and 210 pounds has similar size to Pesce.

"He's such a great skater," Pesce said. "His (defensive) gaps are so good. When you have a D-man like that it kind of makes everything easier for you."

Brind'Amour said Wednesday he likes the "vibe" of the team in camp. One question about the Canes entering this season will be how soon they can be a Stanley Cup contender?

Pesce has the answer.

"I think it's right now," he said. "I think we've proven the past few years we're a threat to any team in the league. We're only getting better, and our young studs are getting older and will only improve."

CANES ON THREE NBCSN TELECASTS

NBC Sports on Wednesday announced its full regular season telecast schedule for the 2020-21 season and the Canes will be shown three times: March 30 at Chicago (7:30 p.m.), April 4 against Dallas at PNC Arena (7 p.m.) and April 26 at Dallas (7:30 p.m.).



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THE ATHLETIC

Wheeler: My 2021 world juniors all-star ballot, MVP pick, risers, and fallers

By Scott Wheeler

That's it. After 28 games in 12 days, Finland defeated Russia in the bronze medal game and the United States topped Canada for gold and the 2021 world juniors title.

"That was by far the biggest goal I've ever scored in my entire life," said Alex Turcotte of his game-winning goal after the 2-0 win. "It was a dream come true. To win a gold medal at the world juniors, it's everything I hoped it would be ... this cemented our legacy."

Here, I'll explain my tournament all-star and MVP ballot, pick a second all-star team, and highlight some risers and fallers.

For more on many of these players, you can also check out my round robin notebook.

Tournament all-star and MVP ballot

My ballot had to be submitted before the end of the first intermission of the gold-medal game.

Forwards

MVP: Trevor Zegras (Anaheim Ducks/Team USA)

Zegras was the best player in the tournament. I don't love painting these types of things in black and white terms, but it was that simple for me. I debated Tim Stuetzle for MVP (it was harder to consider Dylan Cozens or Devon Levi considering the talent around them on Team Canada), given just how important he was to Germany's first-ever quarterfinal appearance. Zegras finished the tournament with more than twice as many points than his nearest teammate in a predominantly 2001-born age group that is loaded with talent, Team USA played in the tougher group, and he chased history throughout, challenging for USA's single-tournament and all-time scoring records. Each of the USA's forward lines found a niche in their own way but Zegras' was the most dangerous player on the ice in basically every game. I think he can play for the Ducks this year if they're willing to give him some leash at the top of the lineup.

Dylan Cozens (Buffalo Sabres/Team Canada)

Cozens ascended in this event, consistently Canada's best game-to-game player. As good as he is, that's almost even more impressive given how much high-end talent was on the Canadian roster. He dominated camp, he dominated round robin, and he dominated the medal round until the gold-medal game. He took good lanes and won his races, he got to the inside with his speed on the puck in transition, and he consistently showcased dangerous offensive zone skills, including an improved shot. It was a tournament for the ages, save the silver medal.

Tim Stuetzle (Ottawa Senators/Team Germany)

I mean, what can you say really? I gave Zegras the edge over Stuetzle for the MVP because of the longevity of USA's run, the point spread I talked about (John-Jason Peterka almost flew under the radar with his 10 points, equal to Stuetzle's),

etc. but Stuetzle executed the tournament's best individual efforts, demonstrated improved commitment defensively, and averaged a titanic 25:40 time on ice per game (first among forwards and second in the tournament) and 4.2 shots per game. He was sensational under tough circumstances.

Defence

Bowen Byram (Colorado Avalanche/Team Canada)

Picking the defencemen for my ballot was tougher this year. Last year, Maple Leafs prospect Rasmus Sandin was the clear No. 1 choice and there were a number of options for the second spot (led by the Flyers' Egor Zamula, Coyotes' Victor Soderstrom, Canadiens' Alexander Romanov, and Red Wings' Moritz Seider). This year there wasn't really either of those things. I think Byram had the best tournament of the bunch, leading Canada in average ice-time at 22:59, creating offensively, and driving results, but I wouldn't say it was as notable a performance as Sandin's was, especially considering Canada's soft pre-gold medal schedule. Still, he played a more physical, tone-setting style, and led the way throughout in all situations.

Ville Heinola (Winnipeg Jets/Team Finland)

This decision was even more difficult, and I debated a couple of other players because I thought he played really poorly in Finland's 4-1 loss to Canada in the round robin and it's hard to put someone who played a bad game in a seven-game tournament on the all-star team. But the Finns made it further than they probably should have in the tournament and Heinola was their most important defenceman for that run. Heinola's game has always been marked by his calculated efficiency and the smoothness with which he operates in all three zones. But I have always wanted him to demonstrate a little more skill, and play a little more aggressively with the puck on his stick. This year, he did that, attacking off of the offensive zone blue line more often than any other defender in the tournament, showcasing his hands (a real asset), using his footwork to his advantage, and hitting some tough seams with NHL-level passing acumen. I was disappointed in how passive he looked in big moments in last year's tournament. That wasn't the case at all. He created a ton of chances, following up on a strong start to the season in Liiga. You can start to see little details emerge, including a curl-and-drag wrister that really pops and some subtle fakes that really open up the game for him. He also created a brilliant highlight-reel goal to tie it 2-2 against Sweden that was called back, and played monster minutes (more than any non-German player) throughout.

Goalie

Devon Levi (Florida Panthers/Team Canada)

His feet, his control (even from his knees when he would get caught in scrambles), the record-tying three shutouts, the composure in the net. All after he wasn't invited to Canada's summer evaluation camp and joined November's selection camp late after a 14-day quarantine due to the travel



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restrictions for the U.S. college players into Canada. There was so much talk of the strength of the goaltenders the Russians, Americans and Swedes brought in this year's age group, and then Levi looked mostly unflappable. There is literally nothing about his game that I'm willing to pick apart. He rarely pulled out of position, he swallowed his rebounds, and he stuck with shooters one-on-one whenever he was tested. I'm looking forward to watching him at Northeastern over the next few years.

The all-snob team

There isn't a second all-star team for the event, but if there were, consider this my ballot.

Forwards

Matt Boldy (Minnesota Wild/Team USA)

I was this close to putting Boldy on my all-star ballot. Heading into the gold-medal game, when I tweeted my standouts after each of the tournament's games, Boldy was one of the two or three USA players I listed in four of their six games (actually one more time than Zegras). Boldy became USA head coach Nate Leaman's go-to guy in all situations, often leading the forwards in ice time. He was excellent on the top power-play unit, he was one of (if not the) the team's best penalty killers, and he was always the first go over the boards for key defensive zone situations. Some special performances offensively kept him off of my ballot but he would've been on the tournament all-star team in most other years.

Anton Lundell (Florida Panthers/Team Finland)

Lundell was Finland's best player from start to finish in the tournament, opening the scoring in their first round-robin game against Germany and closing the tournament with a game-tying goal to make it 1-1 and an empty netter to seal the bronze medal win over the Russians at 3-1. He was involved in all facets (including winning 91 of the 130 faceoffs he took, or 70 percent), he drove play with the puck, and he played on the inside. I wrote pre-tournament that if the Finns were going to go on a run to a medal in this event, it was probably because Lundell was going to have played his way onto the tournament all-star team. He didn't disappoint, even if some brilliant performances from other forwards kept him off my ballot.

Connor McMichael (Washington Capitals/Team Canada)

His skating looks improved, with quicker acceleration from a standstill. He handles the puck extremely well with one hand on his stick which helps him go inside-out and cut to his backhand to drive on defenders. And he just gets it. He understands how to play the game and how to adjust to his linemates. Heading into the gold-medal game, he was second to Cozens on the team in shots on goal (22) and points (8), even though the stat keepers had missed an assist of his on the 5-0 empty-net goal against Russia in the semis. He was excellent in all-situations and scored an unassisted shorthanded goal against the Germans. I thought he was going to be a middle-six guy in his draft year but his progression since has given him clear top-six upside. I think he's ready to play in the NHL right now. Whether the Capitals will afford him that opportunity this season is TBD.

Defence

Toopi Niemela (Toronto Maple Leafs/Team Finland)

When it was time for me to cast my ballot, Niemela was the tournament's leading defenceman in points. But he did it on a pairing that ceded the toughest matchups to other defencemen (including Heinola's pair with Santeri Hatakka, and often Mikko Kokkonen's pair as well), and with four of his eight points coming on the power play. It was still a great tournament for Niemela, especially as an 18-year-old. He looked comfortable with the puck on his stick under pressure, his neutral zone instincts were impressive on gaps and step-ups, and he didn't look phased by the minutes he did get (which were, to his credit, third among Finland's D). But I don't think he played a role that was significant enough to be named one of the tournament's two best defencemen.

Cam York (Philadelphia Flyers/Team USA)

York had a couple of tough moments that are easy to latch on to and say "that didn't look good" and he still needs to be harder on pucks and more aggressive on his reads but I came away impressed by his tournament on the whole. In the Americans' tough opener against Russia, when their defence caved under the forecheck, he was really the only one who looked comfortable. He was the only USA player to average more than 20 minutes a night, he made some smart plays with the puck which led to chances and goals. I considered Jake Sanderson here instead of York because he was the more consistent player defensively, but they were both good.

Goalie

Spencer Knight (Florida Panthers/Team USA)

Knight didn't look like himself in USA's tournament-opening loss to the Russians, giving up a couple of ugly goals (including one he gave away). It was hard for him to really challenge Levi for the all-star team as a result, especially because votes had to be cast before he pitched a gold-medal game shutout. But he was stellar throughout, looking like the composed, technically-brilliant goalie that has made him one of the three best prospects at his position in the sport, with another 22-save shutout against the Czechs, a 27-save shutout against the Swedes, and a strong semifinal performance against Finland in a game where the Americans took five minor penalties and were outshot.

Honourable mentions:

- C Alex Turcotte (Los Angeles Kings/Team USA)
- C/W Peyton Krebs (Vegas Golden Knights/Team Canada)
- RW John-Jason Peterka (Buffalo Sabres/Team Germany)
- LHD Jake Sanderson (Ottawa Senators/Team USA)
- RHD Jamie Drysdale (Anaheim Ducks/Team Canada)
- G Kari Piironen (Team Finland)

Risers



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These are players who improved their stock relative to what I thought of them before the tournament or caught my eye when they weren't really on my radar previously.

RHD Drew Helleison (Colorado Avalanche/Team USA)

Team USA had a bit of a lefty-righty conundrum heading into the tournament. When they announced they were bringing nine defencemen just three were righties and just two were expected to play regular minutes. I wasn't sure Helleison, one of those two, should have been. But wow did he ever look like he belonged once the puck dropped. He made smart choices with the puck, his skating looked smoother than a year ago, he surprised me with the number of skill plays he made within the offensive zone, regularly demonstrating soft hands and a willingness to cut to better spots. He didn't play a huge role, finishing fifth among Team USA's defencemen in average ice time, but I thought he was really good in those minutes and a pleasant surprise. Plus his D-zone game has always been there.

LW Brett Berard (New York Rangers/Team USA)

The Americans needed some of their depth forwards to step up to go on a run. Berard and Coyotes prospect John Farinacci became those guys. Berard gets the nod over Farinacci here because I've always been pretty high on Farinacci. Berard found seams, stayed on the puck, played with his usual fearlessness, and also showed nice flashes as a passer. He just goes at whatever lane he's given in the middle of the ice. He's the king of player that puts together full shifts rather than singular moments. He has always been fun to watch, leaving me thinking "he might be a depth guy at the next level" but I'm a smidge more confident in that after his showing than I was before.

C Florian Elias (Team Germany)

Passed up in last year's draft, Elias looked closer to "NHL prospect" than "passenger on a line with Stuetzle and Peterka." He's small but he works hard, he's got skill, and he's sturdy, with a lower, powerful base to his stride that helps him play through contact to keep plays alive. He was often the low guy on that line defensively, he did a good job catching up to them in transition, he's got great hands in tight, and I liked his willingness to chase down loose pucks and forecheck. Will he get picked next summer as an overager? I'm not sure. But his junior track record domestically in Germany and international track record both suggest he's a legitimate player in his age group and I think he's got the tools needed to be a decent pro player, even if that's never in the NHL. He'd be on my radar.

Fallers

These are players who disappointed me relative to my pre-tournament expectations. I have tried to be particularly measured here because I think there's more to be taken away from those who impress in this kind of a setting than from those who don't. There's more than talent at play in outcomes at the world juniors, including linemates, usage, strength of team and group, and this year the long layoff and quarantines, among other things.

LW/RW Zion Nybeck (Carolina Hurricanes/Team Sweden)

If there was one thing this year's disappointing Swedish team lacked it was skill up front. They had two of the five most talented goalies in the tournament (hell, they had an excellent third-stringer in Calle Clang too!), they had an excellent defence, but after losing Karl Henriksson and William Eklund to COVID protocols, they were thinner on creators than they usually are, putting a lot of pressure on Lucas Raymond, Alexander Holtz, and Noel Gunler to crack open shifts. Had Nybeck stepped up in the same way someone like Canucks prospect Arvid Costmar did, it would've made a difference. But he didn't and was completely unnoticeable throughout. Some of that was about linemates, minutes, and usage for sure but they still needed more out of him.

LHD Daniil Chayka (2021 NHL Draft/Team Russia)

I don't love the idea of being critical of a draft-eligible player in an under-20 tournament but Chayka played a big role for the Russians in their Karjala Cup win, he's on the older side of this year's draft class, and they needed him to be good if they were going to be good — and he wasn't. As the tournament progressed, his minutes faded. He struggled, in particular, in the first two games of the tournament and was scratched after the Russians lost to the Czechs. It's a small sample size but I thought it was notable that he looked pedestrian.

LW Vladislav Firstov (Minnesota Wild/Team Russia)

Firstov had an opportunity, like Nybeck, but on a Russian team that was built heavy but not particularly skilled up front, to make some plays and give his team a bit of a different look. And though his minutes were limited throughout, making it tough on him, he looked completely out of sorts on the ice. The lack of touches because he wasn't getting a regular shift played a role in all likelihood. So did, surely, the fact that this was his first time playing for Russia internationally. But he also played poorly and looked stilted. Something to keep an eye on if he fails to take a step at UConn as a sophomore. Leafs prospect Mikhail Abramov, who was fighting him for roster spot early on, outplayed him.



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Get to know the Central: Hurricanes have new division in '21

The new-look Central Division includes two teams from the Metro, both Stanley Cup finalists and other unfamiliar foes

RALEIGH — The Carolina Hurricanes opened their abbreviated training camp for the 2020-21 season this week without a lot of questions about how the opening night lineup will look.

Coach Rod Brind'Amour will need to figure out where newcomer Jesper Fast fits into his lines, how the team's defense will be paired, and which players Carolina will carry on its taxi squad.

What will look different are their opponents this season — seven teams from the newly formed Central Division that will serve as the only competition the Hurricanes will play until the playoffs in May. Each team will play each other eight times, with the top four teams reaching the postseason.

So with one week until opening night in Detroit, here's a look at the seven other teams in the Central and what you need to know before they all become very familiar with one another over the course of the shortened 56-game season.

Chicago Blackhawks

2019-20: 32-30-8, 72 points; 4-1 series loss to Vegas in first round

Newsworthy: Chicago was already aging and thin on talent — not to mention inexperienced in goal — then it lost its top two centers on the eve of camp. Captain Jonathan Toews is out indefinitely with an undisclosed illness, and up-and-comer Kirby Dach suffered a fractured wrist at the World Juniors that will keep him out most of the season. Forward Alex Nylander is also out with a knee injury.

The Blackhawks' three-headed goalie of Collin Delia, Kevin Lankinen and Malcolm Subban will try and replace the departed Corey Crawford in net, but 2020-21 has all the makings of a rough season in the Windy City.

Familiar faces: Lucas Wallmark, traded by the Hurricanes to Florida in the deal that brought Vincent Trocheck to Carolina last season, signed a one-year deal with the Blackhawks during the offseason and suddenly looks like he'll be a middle-six pivot for Chicago. Defenseman Calvin de Haan is in his second year with Chicago since being traded there by Carolina last offseason.

Columbus Blue Jackets

2019-20: 33-22-15, 81 points; 4-1 series loss to Tampa Bay in first round

Newsworthy: Would it be a Blue Jackets season without contract drama? Columbus signed franchise center Pierre-

Luc Dubois to a two-year extension before training camp, but he also requested a trade. Now coach John Tortorella and his team could again be facing what they dealt with when both Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin let it be known they wanted out of Ohio two seasons ago.

The Blue Jackets did trade Josh Anderson for Maxi Domi in the offseason while also adding veteran center Miko Koivu.

Familiar faces: Almost everyone. Other than the newcomers like Domi and Koivu, Carolina knows the Central's only other Metropolitan Division team well. Former Hurricanes Zac Dalpe, Nathan Gerbe and Riley Nash will all have a chance at bottom-six roles for the Blue Jackets.

Dallas Stars

2019-20: 37-24-8, 82 points; 4-2 series loss to Tampa Bay in Stanley Cup Final

Newsworthy: After a run to the Stanley Cup Final, the Stars will start the 2020-21 season without star forward Tyler Seguin and goalie Ben Bishop. Dallas still boasts a solid mix of established veterans, like Jamie Benn, Joe Pavelski and Alexander Radulov, and young talent, namely Miro Heiskanen and Roope Hintz.

Familiar faces: With Bishop out, the goaltending reins again fall into the hands of Anton Khudobin, who handled those duties during the Stars' playoff run last year. Defenseman Andrej Sekera, another former Hurricane, is back for another year in Dallas.

Detroit Red Wings

2019-20: 17-49-5, 39 points; did not qualify for postseason

Newsworthy: It's likely to be another tough year for the Red Wings, but GM Steve Yzerman should start to see some of the young talent he's assembled on the ice this season. Thomas Greiss will provide some stability in net, but Detroit still looks like it will be the doormat of the division.

Familiar faces: No former Hurricanes are in line to be on the Detroit roster, but there will be some sibling sightings. In a cap move, the Red Wings took on the final year of defenseman Marc Staal's contract from the Rangers, while Evgeny Svechnikov is recovered from a knee injury and hopes to carve out an NHL role and face his little brother Andrei this year.

Florida Panthers

2019-20: 35-26-8, 78 points; 3-1 playoff qualifier series loss to Islanders



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Newsworthy: The Panthers lost firepower up front with the departures of Mike Hoffman and Evgenii Dadonov, but there's top-shelf talent with Aleksander Barkov and Jonathan Huberdeau along with additions Patric Hornqvist and Anthony Duclair.

Familiar faces: A couple former Hurricanes prospects from Finland will get a shot to make the Panthers this season in Aleksis Saarela and Eetu Luostarinen. Defensemen Jake Massie and Chase Priskie were also once in the Carolina pipeline. Prospect Riley Stillman — son of Cory Stillman, who won a Cup with the Hurricanes in 2006 — could make the team.

And then there's Scott Darling, the goalie who bombed out in Carolina halfway through his big four-year deal and is now on a professional tryout in Florida — the team that officially bought him out following the James Reimer trade before last season.

Nashville Predators

2019-20: 35-26-8, 78 points; 3-1 playoff qualifier series loss to Arizona

Newsworthy: The Predators look like a team that's headed toward a rebuild. There's still talent — most notably Roman Josi and Ryan Johansen — and solid goaltending, but the roster has a patchwork feel after Nashville added a couple

pieces right before camp that could block some of their young talent from getting NHL experience.

Familiar faces: Erik Haula, whose expiring contract was traded to Florida at the deadline last year in the Trocheck trade, signed a one-year deal with Nashville just before Christmas. He'll miss the start of camp as he awaits the birth of his first child.

Tampa Bay Lightning

2019-20: 43-21-6, 92 points; Stanley Cup champions

Newsworthy: The Lightning are built to take a run at defending their title, and they will have captain Steven Stamkos back in the fold to join a wealth of talent that won a Cup mostly without him. Missing, however, is Nikita Kucherov, the 2018-19 Hart Trophy winner who is out for the regular season following hip surgery. Tampa Bay had to jostle its roster to become cap compliant, losing several key complementary players from a season ago, but the Lightning still have the likes of Brayden Point, Victor Hedman, Andrei Vasilevskiy and Canes killer Tyler Johnson.

Familiar faces: Former Hurricanes backup goalie Curtis McElhinney is again the No. 2 in Tampa Bay this season. Rough-and-tumble Barclay Goodrow was a prospect camp invitee for the Hurricanes long ago.



Tweetmail No. 247: Camp, Taxi Squad & Jersey Colors

by Michael Smith

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

We start this week with an email question, so let's get to it.

Can the Hurricanes add the players from the World Junior Championships to the training camp roster when the tournament is finished? - Greg C.

Before we get to your question, Greg, how about Team USA?! What an effort in the gold medal match. It was music to my ears to walk into Wake Competition Center this morning and hear Bill Burniston's very USA-centric playlist ringing out in the locker room.

Considering quarantine requirements, the Canes' four prospects who competed in the IIHF World Junior Championship will not be joining the team's training camp, which is already almost halfway over.

What you could see is this: Canes prospects like Ryan Suzuki, Jamieson Rees and Seth Jarvis heading to Chicago

until the Ontario Hockey League and Western Hockey League get their seasons off the ground. In a typical season, had they not cracked the Canes' roster, these teenagers would have to play in their junior leagues. To potentially have the opportunity to gain experience at the American Hockey League level, however brief it may be, would be extremely beneficial from a developmental standpoint.

"Any time an athlete has the opportunity to play at a level that is higher than their current club is a learning experience," said Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke.

Joakim Ryan is in group C1. Is there a rotation for his spot or should we expect him in the main roster? - @leholmes52

At least through the first two days of training camp, there hasn't been a rotation between the groups; it's been Joakim Ryan skating alongside Jake Bean as the fourth defensive pair in group C1, which is the NHL group.

An argument could be made for the Canes carrying Ryan as their seventh defenseman, but there's also a case for him to be placed on the taxi squad.

Speaking of which ...



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Curious what the early pulse of the team is with the ability to utilize the taxi squad. Does that solve our issue with Ned on a one way deal this season? - @andyjohnson_

OK, so let's talk taxi squad.

The active roster limit remains 23 players for this season, but each team will also carry a taxi squad of four to six players, one of which will have to be a third goaltender if one is not on the team's active roster. The taxi squad will practice with the NHL team and could travel with the team, as needed, too. The taxi squad is designed to help combat an emergency situation in which COVID-19 forces a number of players out of the lineup, and in a year with a flat salary cap, it provides some spending flexibility, too.

Prior to training camp, I chatted with Canes President and General Manager Don Waddell to get his thoughts on how the team might utilize the taxi squad.

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

On defense, Ryan and Bean are the two names that jump out, given they've been skating with the NHL group. Bean can be assigned to the taxi squad without having to pass through waivers, so that's almost a no-brainer given the salary cap relief the taxi squad designation allows. Ryan, on the other hand, would have to clear waivers in order to be assigned to the taxi squad. That's not to say the Canes wouldn't make that move, but it's a calculated risk with the reward of salary cap relief, an important consideration given the upper limit is likely to move north very little, if any at all, heading into the 2021-22 season, and both Andrei Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton are due contract extensions in the near future.

Gustav Forsling and Joey Keane are names to watch on defense, as well. Up front, Max McCormick and Steven Lorentz would make good taxi squad candidates, given both were with the Canes in the bubble and could seamlessly jump into the lineup if called upon.

Alex Nedeljkovic figures to be the team's third goaltender. He would have to pass through waivers to land on the taxi squad, so it might make more sense to keep him on the active roster, especially since he's on a one-way contract.

There's also the possibility Canes could look at someone like Suzuki or Rees or Jarvis for the taxi squad, but it's important to have NHL-depth at the ready.

"We have to make sure when we go on this first road trip of four games that you have bodies that can jump right into the

lineup," Waddell said. "You have to make sure you have enough depth on your taxi squad to support what you need at the NHL level."

Only two Friday games on the schedule, so which day will be the new black jersey day? - @MattPetersonPE

Aaaaand only one of those Friday games is at home, so RIP to "On Fridays, we wear black," at least for this season. You won't have to wait long to see this year's uniform schedule, though. It was just finalized and will drop in the coming days.

Speaking of jerseys ...

Can you explain how the colors of practice jerseys are used? I know black is defense but haven't been able to figure out the rest and not sure I've seen anyone ever talk about it. - @ArcherforCanes

I featured a similar question way back in Tweetmail No. 83, but that was more than five years ago, so we're overdue for a refresher.

You nailed the first one, @ArcherForCanes. Defensemen (and sometimes a forward who fills in on defense for practice, like Teuvo Teravainen has done before) wear black jerseys. Forwards wear red and white sweaters; two lines dress in red and the other two dress in white. The team used to mix in some extra colors, like gray and blue, but it's been a few seasons since we've seen anything other than red and white. There's no real significance to these colors, aside from differentiating lines.

When practice shifts to special teams work, you might also see the power play dress in red and the penalty kill in white, which results in some sweater swapping or double layering.

Finally, there's the yellow jersey worn by an injured player who is working his way back into the lineup but is not yet cleared for contact. Similar to a quarterback wearing a starkly different shade of jersey in a football practice, the yellow sweater stands out and indicates no physical contact.

As great as WCC is, what's the one thing the team misses from RCI? (stipulation - the answer can't be "the commute") - @TheBenSwain

I asked around, and the resounding answers were "nothing" and "the commute," soooooo ...

More questions and answers coming your way soon!

If you have a question you'd like answered or you have something you'll miss about Raleigh Center Ice, you can find me on Twitter at @MSmithCanes, or you can drop me an email.



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Carolina Hurricanes 2020-21 NHL season preview

By Marisa Ingemi

The 2020-21 NHL season is almost here so it's time to preview all 31 teams. Over the next few weeks we'll be looking at how the offseason affected each team, the most interesting people in the organization, and the best- and worst-case scenarios. Today, we look at the Carolina Hurricanes.

Carolina Hurricanes 2019-20 Rewind

Record: 38-25-5 (81 points); fourth in Metropolitan Division; sixth in Eastern Conference

Leading scorers: Sebastian Aho (66 points), Teuvo Teravainen (63 points)

The Hurricanes were a fun team in 2019-20, as per tradition. Sebastian Aho continues to be one of the most underrated scorers in the league and the Carolina scoring overall has proven to be solid.

They had the whole "beating a team with their own Zamboni driver as its goalie" narrative, but the Hurricanes are deeper than their surface-level jerks identity. In a division of usual suspects to top the standings, the Hurricanes have the brightest future.

They haven't made too many changes, and some of that is they didn't have to. This is one of the most interesting teams in the entire league.

Additions

Jesper Fast (free agency), Joakim Ryan (free agency)

Subtractions

Trevor van Riemsdyk (free agency), Anton Forsberg (free agency), Justin Williams (retirement), Joel Edmundson (trade)

3 Most Interesting Carolina Hurricanes

- Sebastian Aho: Maybe it's because he plays south of D.C. but it seems like the NHL world isn't completely aware how good Aho has been the past few years. He's only 23 years old and netted 38 goals last season, and there's no way he's done improving yet. He's led them in points for three straight seasons and probably will again.

- Andrei Svechnikov: In just his second season, Svechnikov added on from his stellar rookie season with 61 points. He's flashy (hello, lacrosse goals) and talented, and he and Aho are the perfect representation of the next generation of stars in the NHL. The top line of those two with Teravainen is going to make some noise once again and should be in the conversation for one of the best in the entire league.

- Jaccob Slavin: Slavin has emerged as a solid top pairing defenseman and he's a great fit with Dougie Hamilton, who has thrived with the Hurricanes. Perhaps it's even the best defensive pairing in the NHL. A year ago, he posted the best offensive numbers of his career at age 26 and in less games, to boot. He's going to be a Norris Trophy candidate for a few seasons yet.

Best-Case Scenario

It's a tough draw for a division with the Stanley Cup champion Lightning and the runner-up Stars. Luckily for the Hurricanes, they project to be in that next tier as the bottom half of the division weakens considerably. Columbus should vie for a spot for certain but it's really tough seeing the Hurricanes fall out of a playoff spot without some sort of disaster.

There's a chance everything clicks and they're better than expected and finish ahead of the Stars, too. They have arguably the best defensive pairing in the league and plenty of scorers, and a condensed schedule could be beneficial.

Worst-Case Scenario

So let's say they have some sort of disaster. What does it look like? Is it enough to drop out of a playoff spot entirely? Perhaps Florida or Nashville compete a bit more than expected and the Blue Jackets take a dramatic leap and force the Hurricanes to fight for that fourth spot. Maybe the goaltending bubble finally bursts and James Reimer and Peter Mrzak can't stop a beach ball. It still feels like the Hurricanes have so much talent up front they'll be in the race for the postseason by default, but hey, it's the NHL so you never know.

Pointsbet – Carolina Hurricanes Stanley Cup odds

Hurricanes +2200.



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Looking at the New Division: Centers

Along with new challenges in dealing with the pandemic, the NHL will be entering the 2021 season with new divisions. As a part of the new Central division, let's see how the Hurricanes match up down the middle.

By Ryan Henkel

For the first time in a long time, the Carolina Hurricanes look well stocked down the middle. Sebastian Aho is getting better every year, the recent addition of Vincent Trocheck finally adds a competent 2C, Jordan Staal is a defensive monster and Morgan Geekie seems to be ready to step up into the limelight with that constantly-running engine of his.

While the Hurricanes may be strong down the middle, how does the rest of the division look there?

Chicago Blackhawks

1. Jonathan Toews (X)
2. Kirby Dach (X)
3. Dylan Strome
4. Pius Suter
5. Carl Soderberg
6. Lucas Wallmark

In two swift weeks, Chicago lost its promising, dynamic center to an injury sustained during a World Juniors preliminary match and, soon after that, it was announced that the team's captain was dealing with a serious health concern, leaving both seemingly out for the entire season. Now, a team that was already predicted to struggle, may see its floundering intensify.

The Blackhawks' next best option is Dylan Strome, who has played top-six minutes for them before, to fill out the top role. There is also hope shown throughout training camp that Pius Suter can step up in the 2C spot. Past him, there is the newly acquired 35-year old Carl Soderberg, former Hurricane Lucas Wallmark and David Kampf to fall back on. Not a lot of offensive promise among that group.

Columbus Blue Jackets

1. Pierre-Luc Dubois
2. Max Domi
3. Mikko Koivu
4. Riley Nash

Things were hot for a second on the Pierre-Luc Dubois trade front, but he signed a two-year deal to remain in Columbus. Dubois is a great player, but past that, the Blue Jackets center depth is questionable.

Domi by all means should be better in Columbus than he was in Montreal, but that isn't a guarantee as he was not good as a Canadien. Koivu is nearing 38 years of age and it's a big question of what more does he have left as he wasn't too impactful in Minnesota.

Former Hurricane Nash, however, has been a consistent fourth-line center and will help to stabilize Columbus' lines.

Dallas Stars

1. Tyler Seguin (X)
2. Joe Pavelski
3. Roope Hintz
4. Radek Faksa
5. Jason Dickinson

While not as drastic as Chicago's losses, Tyler Seguin's absence till April will still leave a huge hole for the Stars. Joe Pavelski did well to fill in the top role during Seguin's struggles in the playoffs so that may be fine, but the lack of secondary scoring is a question mark for the team.

Roope Hintz will more than likely be relied upon to step up into that role, while Radek Faksa and Jason Dickinson are more defensive forwards than scoring threats much akin to the overall nature of the team.

Detroit Red Wings

1. Dylan Larkin
2. Robby Fabbri
3. Valtteri Filppula
4. Luke Glendening

Dylan Larkin is good... That's about all I've got.

Florida Panthers

1. Aleksander Barkov
2. Noel Acciari
3. Alex Wennberg
4. Carter Verhaeghe

The most overrated player in terms of his underratedness, in all seriousness Barkov is actually a top center in the league. That helps a lot. Acciari has flourished in his role with Florida, but he still doesn't seem like a 2C. Wennberg is in a similar boat as more of a 3C and Verhaeghe rounds out the group as a cheap pick up after he wasn't qualified by Tampa Bay.

Florida seems like a top heavy team that is hoping someone will be able to step up into a 2C role. They probably should have made a move for someone like Trocheck.



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Nashville Predators

1. Ryan Johansen
2. Matt Duchene
3. Erik Haula
4. Brad Richardson

Somehow, Nashville has one of the better center groups in the division; at least on paper. Even that though is debatable, because those top three all had tremendous struggles last season.

But if we think of how these players SHOULD perform, Nashville has a strong group. If Ryan Johansen can regain the chemistry with Filip Forsberg and Viktor Arvidsson than he is a big boost for that Predator team and the same goes for Duchene.

Adding Erik Haula for a potential bounce back was a smart, low-risk move and Brad Richardson has always been a dependable forward and penalty killer making him an ideal fourth liner.

Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25, #3: Martin Necas

The big question with Necas is can he follow the path of Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov with a breakout sophomore season?

By Cody Hagan

Name: Martin Necas

Position: Forward

Age: 21

Acquired: 2017 Draft, Round 1, Pick #12

2020-21 Team: Carolina Hurricanes (NHL)

2019-20 Regular Season Stats: 64 GP, 16 G, 20 A, 36 Pts

We've reached the point in the countdown where the top three should be pretty obvious. Today we talk about the next blooming star for the Hurricanes, Martin Necas.

When the Carolina Hurricanes drafted Necas No. 12 overall in 2017 there were hopes he could be a future number one center for the organization. At that time it was unknown if Sebastian Aho would play wing or center and the team needed depth down the middle. There was much promise to the young Czech center and the pick felt like a win immediately.

Fast forward a few years and we now know Aho is the team's number one center for the foreseeable future and Necas is following a similar, yet slightly different path to Aho. During his rookie year, nobody knew if Aho was a center or wing and at this point the same question remains for Necas. Both guys played wing entirely during their rookie campaigns.

While Aho has solidified the top spot down the middle there are still many questions about who plays center on the second line. At one point it was supposed to be Jordan Staal and that

Nashville has good pieces, but will they reach their potential this year is the question.

Tampa Bay Lightning

1. Brayden Point
2. Anthony Cirelli
3. Yannick Gourde
4. Mitchell Stephens

Potentially the best group of centers in the new Central division belongs to the current Cup champs. Big surprise there.

Starting at the top, Point has proven to be an elite centerman and one of the most dynamic players in the league. Freshly re-signed Cirelli has become one of the best defensive forwards, placing fourth in Selke voting. Gourde rounds out the top-nine being a difficult center to play against on that tough checking line of Gourde, Blake Coleman and Barclay Goodrow that will not only break you ,but also score on you as well. Stephens wraps it all up being a cheap option that doesn't harm the team at all.

never worked out. Then it was Erik Haula, and now the spot belongs to Vincent Trochek. But for how long?

If Necas can follow the same path that Aho and Andrei Svechnikov took then his second season could be his breakout year. Will there be a transition to playing center? We will have to see but it appears based off training camp so far that Rod Brind'Amour has hope.

Necas scored 36 points over 64 games during his rookie season where he was used sparingly as Brind'Amour has shown he wants to make rookies learn the game the proper way and not just throw them in to every situation. He did the same with Svechnikov, who scored just 37 points in a full 82 games during his rookie season. Aho scored 49 over his 82-game rookie season and if you pace Necas over 82 games he would have scored around 46 points.

There certainly were plenty of signs throughout the season to show why many people remain so high on Necas' ceiling as he flashed his skill numerous times including this beauty:

One big advantage Necas has at this point in his development over both Svechnikov and Aho is he got to play a full season in the AHL in 2018-19, in which he helped carry the Charlotte Checkers to a Calder Cup Championship. That season of development could prove vital as he progresses through the next few years.

While many questions remain about where Necas plays in the lineup this season and if Rod Brind' Amour will loosen the leash this season, one thing is for sure. Martin Necas is a major part of the young core of the Hurricanes.

He certainly couldn't have a better coach to learn from if he ends up down the middle and he can use Svechnikov and Aho's successes to help him learn. At this point it seems very likely that the three of them will be the faces of the Carolina Hurricanes up front for a very long time to come.



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Getting to know the new Central: Carolina Hurricanes

Let's give the Hurricanes' new division rivals a chance to know them.

By Andrew Schnittker

With NHL teams entering new divisions this year, sites around SB Nation are giving their new opponents a chance to get to know their teams. Today, it's our turn, as the Hurricanes will be a fairly unique division rival for teams Carolina has mostly played just two or three times a season for the past seven years.

Check out the previous three days' editions from the Red Wings, Predators and Panthers.

Be sure to stay tuned to Storm Advisory to read the answers from the other teams around the new division going forward. For now, let's give everyone a chance to get to know the Carolina Hurricanes:

1. How would you describe your team's style of play? Under head coach Rod Brind'Amour, the Hurricanes play a fast-paced, up-tempo style of play. This team thrives on puck possession, and is consistently among the best possession teams in the league. They're also going to fire away in the offensive zone, as the Hurricanes are third in shots on goal per game over the last two seasons.

The Hurricanes are going to activate their defensemen and have them join the play, and the team has plenty who can do it in Dougie Hamilton, Jaccob Slavin, Brady Skjei and Jake Gardiner. That's not to say the Hurricanes are a run-and-gun, throw caution to the wind kind of team. Brind'Amour still wants everyone to be defensively responsible, and has sheltered younger players while they learn that side of the game.

2. What players should opposing fans know the name of and why? We'll start with the three obvious ones, Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen and Andrei Svechnikov. That trio forms the team's top line and are its top three offensive threats. Aho was two tallies shy of 40 goals last year despite playing just 67 games, and Teravainen is one of the best playmakers in the league. The chemistry the two Finns have in all phases of the game is a treat to watch.

Svechnikov is, of course, known around the league for being the first player in the NHL to successfully score a lacrosse goal... and then do it again. Beyond "The Svech", however, the third-year winger is a force to be reckoned with. He's got an elite wrist shot and plays a strong power-forward type game. Entering his third year in the league, Svechnikov should just keep getting better and better.

Martin Necas, coming off a solid rookie season, is another young, skilled forward who's fun to watch and should be in line for a bigger role in year two.

On the blue line, Dougie Hamilton was having an incredible season and was firmly in the Norris Trophy conversation before suffering a leg injury last season. He's probably the best offensive defenseman the Hurricanes have ever had, and will definitely be one to watch in a contract year.

We seem to be getting past the point of Jaccob Slavin as the best-kept secret in the NHL, but it's hard to overstate his

importance to the Hurricanes on the top pair with Hamilton. Slavin is among the best pure defensemen in the league, with the ability to break up play after play in the defensive zone, while also joining the fun at the other end.

3. Why could your team win the division? Especially with Tampa Bay being without Nikita Kucherov for the full season, I think this is a more likely scenario than people think. The Hurricanes are a good team with a deep roster of talented players. They likely need a few breaks to go their way for this to happen, but the best version of the Hurricanes probably looks something like this:

Petr Mrazek and James Reimer continue to provide solid, if unspectacular, goaltending, and perhaps take a step firmly into the "consistently good" category. The top line of Aho, Tervainen and Svechnikov is just as dominant as last year, perhaps a little bit better as Svechnikov takes a step forward. Necas takes a similar step forward to Svechnikov in his sophomore season, Vincent Trocheck bounces back to producing like a legit top-six center in his first full season with the team and one of Nino Niederreiter or Ryan Dzingel bounces back to their previous form to give the Canes a legit second line and balance out their top six.

Hamilton continues to play at the Norris-caliber level he was pre injury last year, and the defensive group is even better with a full season of Brady Skjei and healthy years from Hamilton and Pesce.

It's perhaps not terribly likely that all of that happens, but it's not out of the realm of possibility either.

4. Why could your team be the caboose?

The first answer is the one that could face pretty much every team this season: a rash of injuries to key players after a short training camp, or lengthy absences of large groups of players due to COVID cases.

On the ice, the worst version of the Hurricanes looks like this: Trocheck continues his injury-plagued, below top-six level play from the last two seasons, Necas doesn't step forward, Niederreiter and Dzingel don't bounce back and the Canes get almost nothing resembling adequate depth scoring beyond their top three.

Hamilton's contract year is too big a distraction for him to play at a high level, Pesce isn't the same post-injury and the D corps takes a step back. Mrazek and Reimer tank, and the Hurricanes' goaltending reverts to its horrific pre 2018-19 levels.

I really don't think it's likely all of that happens, but even if it does, it's hard for me to imagine a mostly healthy Hurricanes team finishing below the Red Wings and Blackhawks.

5. On a scale of baby kitten to Tiger King, what's the potential of a heated matchup with your new division mates?

This is interesting, because most of these teams are ones the Hurricanes only see two or three times a year normally. However, with all of these squads squaring off eight times this season, and the schedule mostly made up of pairs (or more) of games against the same opponent, it's easy to see bad



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blood developing. As of now, here's the likelihood I see for a rivalry with each new opponent, ranked:

7. Dallas Stars - I know the Stars are a physical team, so these games could get chippy, but as of right now it's hard to remember any animosity between the Hurricanes and Stars. The Canes are likely to see a familiar face in Anton Khudobin in the opposing crease at least a few times in this series, so that could be interesting.

6. Florida Panthers - These two teams are old Southeast Division rivals, but while it's possible that spark rekindles, there really aren't any players left over from those days on either side. Vincent Trocheck will be manning the No. 2 center spot for the Canes after coming over from Florida at the deadline last year, and could be eager to prove his old team wrong. This one gets a lot more intriguing if Scott Darling makes the Panthers' roster and starts at least a game or two against the Hurricanes.

5. Chicago Blackhawks - This one would have been a lot more interesting a few years ago, before the Blackhawks got so, well, not good, and the Canes had a few more former Blackhawks. Chicago will be reminded of what could have been with eight games against Teravainen, one of the best players in the league who Chicago traded to the Hurricanes along with Bryan Bickell for a pair of draft picks. Chicago currently employs Lucas Wallmark, a fan favorite in Carolina before he was traded to Florida last season, and one who could see a bigger role this season with the Hawks' injuries at center.

4. Detroit Red Wings - I'd have this one higher if the Red Wings even remotely resembled the Detroit powerhouses of yesteryear, but I don't see these games being overly competitive. Still, there will be a very interesting subplot of two pairs of brothers facing off. Jordan and Marc Staal have been division mates all but one season that they've both been in the league, and that won't change this year following Marc's offseason trade to Detroit.

And, provided the reported arm injury Evgeny Svechnikov suffered in Tuesday's practice isn't too serious, he and his brother Andrei will face off for the first time in their careers. Andrei told Hurricanes media Tuesday he's been thinking about playing his brother before he goes to sleep at night, and that he just might try to line him up and hit him on the first shift. Could brotherly love turn this into an underrated showdown?

3. Tampa Bay Lightning - Another former Southeast rivalry, but the same caveat with Florida applies. I think there's a strong chance the Canes finish second in this division, and, if they can remain within striking distance (see what I did there) of the Bolts, these matchups, particularly the late-season ones, will take on added meaning. And, while the Lightning will be without their best player, they're the defending champs, which means they'll be getting everyone's best shot. I wouldn't expect the Hurricanes to be any different.

2. Nashville Predators - This is a rivalry that's made sense from a geographic standpoint for years, but the teams never played more than once a year. That's about to change. Nashville is one of the closest NHL teams by proximity, and, while the fan element won't be there at least to start this year, if conditions with COVID improve enough to allow spectators, could allow for some fun road trips for each fan base. And might we see Andrei Svechnikov and Filip Forsberg score dueling hat tricks? I believe that sound you just heard was a collective howl of anguish from our neighbors to the north.

There have also been rumors that, with the Milwaukee Admirals opting out of the AHL season, the Predators could send players on loan to the Hurricanes' new AHL affiliate in Chicago. So you could have AHL teammates getting called up and playing against each other. The possibilities could be endless when these southern hockey brethren face off, topped only by...

1. Columbus Blue Jackets - The Blue Jackets are the Hurricanes' only holdover opponent from the old Metropolitan Division, so there's already familiarity from playing each other so many times over the past seven seasons.

But there's really one reason I'm putting the Blue Jackets No. 1. For the most part, this schedule is made up of sets of two games against the same team in the same location. The only team the Canes are scheduled to play more than twice in a row is yep, you guessed it, Columbus.

These two teams will square off four times in eight days from March 18-25, with two in Raleigh and two in Columbus. That's the minimum requirement for a playoff series. By the end of four straight against each other, with every game out of 56 taking on added importance in what's likely to be a successful season, it'll be a miracle if tempers don't flare at some point. We may well look back at the third week of March 2021 as the true arrival of a Hurricanes-Blue Jackets rivalry.

TODAY'S LINKS

- <https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article248318455.html>
- <https://theathletic.com/2301838/2021/01/06/wheeler-my-2021-world-juniors-all-star-ballot-mvp-pick-risers-and-fallers/>
- <https://nsjonline.com/article/2021/01/get-to-know-the-central-hurricanes-have-new-division-in-21/>
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- <https://nhl.nbc.com/2021/01/06/carolina-hurricanes-2020-21-nhl-season-preview/>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2021/1/7/22217272/new-central-division-centers-hurricanes-stars-lightning-red-wings-blackhawks-blue-jackets-panthers>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2021/1/6/22216401/carolina-hurricanes-top-25-under-25-4-martin-necas-sopomore-season-break-out-follow-svechnikov-aho>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2021/1/6/22215982/carolina-hurricanes-2021-new-central-division-carolina-hurricanes>



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SportScan

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

1181560 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes' Brett Pesce eager to play again after 'bummer' of missing 2020 playoffs

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Rod Brind'Amour had a lot on his mind on the night of Feb. 22, 2020.

It was before the coronavirus pandemic caused the world to all but stop. There was still hockey being played, and the Carolina Hurricanes were in Toronto facing the Maple Leafs.

Brind'Amour, the Canes coach, watched as starting goalie James Reimer left with an injury. Then, goalie Petr Mrazek. Suddenly, in an OMG moment, a 42-year-old emergency backup goalie named David Ayres was entering the game for the Canes.

But Brind'Amour was facing another serious, pressing matter that night. Defenseman Brett Pesce had left the game with a shoulder injury, after a seemingly innocuous play.

"Just an innocent play. My shoulder came out," Pesce said Wednesday on a media call. "I dislocated it two years ago and opted not to have surgery and just rehab it and just hope it would hold up."

It didn't hold up. The Canes already had lost defenseman Dougie Hamilton in January to a broken leg. Now, Pesce.

Although the Canes won the game with Ayres the unexpected hero in net, Pesce needed surgery. Later, when the Canes prepared for the NHL postseason, Mrazek, Reimer and Hamilton all were good to go. But not Pesce.

For Pesce, that stung, deeply. It only added to his eagerness to get back on the ice this year.

"Really excited to be back with everybody," Pesce said. "It was a long anticipated wait for me, especially getting an extra few months off."

New York Rangers center Greg McKegg (14) and Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Brett Pesce (22) skate to the puck during the first period of an NHL hockey game in Raleigh, N.C., Thursday, Nov. 7, 2019. Gerry Broome AP

Pesce said he had planned to rejoin the team in the Toronto bubble had the Canes been able to beat the Boston Bruins in the best-of-seven first-round series in the 2020 Stanley Cup playoffs. But that was not to be with the Bruins winning in five games.

"It was a bummer," Pesce said. "Missing the playoffs took a toll on me even more so, because when you have an opportunity to compete for the Stanley Cup, that's why everyone plays the game. So that hurt."

And Brind'Amour and the Canes, too. Pesce's game might seem a bit understated, and he might not draw the NHL-wide attention of a Hamilton or Jaccob Slavin, but his grittiness and solid, effective play hardly go unnoticed by his coaches or teammates.

"People, I think, take 'Pesce' for granted about how good he is," forward Jordan Martinook said on the media call. "His offensive game is starting to show, too. Being able to jump into the play and create offense is probably something people don't think about when they think of 'Pesce,' but it's definitely come a long way in the two years I've been here."

Pesce, who played 61 games last season before the injury, was averaging almost 22 minutes a game in ice time and his average of 3:16 shorthanded time per game led the team. That's where he's most valuable. But he had four goals and 14 assists and a plus-7 rating.

"He's an elite defender to me," Brind'Amour said. "When you don't have him, you notice it. He does such a good job at what he does. There's offense there, too. He's a real smart player."

Off the ice, Martinook said Pesce is "one of the guys who keeps it light and has fun."

"He's always smiling when he comes to the rink," Martinook said. "You'll get that kind of New York side to him where he gets in your face and chirps. That's why everybody draws to him. He's happy but he can throw jabs with the best of them. He's just smooth and steady and that's how he is in the room, too."

PESCE PAIRED WITH SKJEI IN CAMP

In the Canes' first three practices of training camp, Pesce has been paired with Brady Skjei. A right-handed shooter, Pesce gives Brind'Amour a solid second D pairing behind Slavin and Hamilton.

Pesce, a Tarrytown, New York, native, was injured two days before Skjei was traded to the Canes from the New York Rangers and it was one of the reasons for the move. But he likes the fit with Skjei, who also is 26 and at 6-3 and 210 pounds has similar size to Pesce.

"He's such a great skater," Pesce said. "His (defensive) gaps are so good. When you have a D-man like that it kind of makes everything easier for you."

Brind'Amour said Wednesday he likes the "vibe" of the team in camp. One question about the Canes entering this season will be how soon they can be a Stanley Cup contender?

Pesce has the answer.

"I think it's right now," he said. "I think we've proven the past few years we're a threat to any team in the league. We're only getting better, and our young studs are getting older and will only improve."

CANES ON THREE NBCSN TELECASTS

NBC Sports on Wednesday announced its full regular season telecast schedule for the 2020-21 season and the Canes will be shown three times: March 30 at Chicago (7:30 p.m.), April 4 against Dallas at PNC Arena (7 p.m.) and April 26 at Dallas (7:30 p.m.).

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1181561 Carolina Hurricanes



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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 / Wheeler: My 2021 world juniors all-star ballot, MVP pick, risers, and fallers

By Scott Wheeler

Jan 6, 2021

That's it. After 28 games in 12 days, Finland defeated Russia in the bronze medal game and the United States topped Canada for gold and the 2021 world juniors title.

"That was by far the biggest goal I've ever scored in my entire life," said Alex Turcotte of his game-winning goal after the 2-0 win. "It was a dream come true. To win a gold medal at the world juniors, it's everything I hoped it would be ... this cemented our legacy."

Here, I'll explain my tournament all-star and MVP ballot, pick a second all-star team, and highlight some risers and fallers.

My ballot had to be submitted before the end of the first intermission of the gold-medal game.

Forwards

MVP: Trevor Zegras (Anaheim Ducks/Team USA)

Zegras was the best player in the tournament. I don't love painting these types of things in black and white terms, but it was that simple for me. I debated Tim Stuetzle for MVP (it was harder to consider Dylan Cozens or Devon Levi considering the talent around them on Team Canada), given just how important he was to Germany's first-ever quarterfinal appearance. Zegras finished the tournament with more than twice as many points than his nearest teammate in a predominantly 2001-born age group that is loaded with talent, Team USA played in the tougher group, and he chased history throughout, challenging for USA's single-tournament and all-time scoring records. Each of the USA's forward lines found a niche in their own way but Zegras' was the most dangerous player on the ice in basically every game. I think he can play for the Ducks this year if they're willing to give him some leash at the top of the lineup.

Dylan Cozens (Buffalo Sabres/Team Canada)

Cozens ascended in this event, consistently Canada's best game-to-game player. As good as he is, that's almost even more impressive given how much high-end talent was on the Canadian roster. He dominated camp, he dominated round robin, and he dominated the medal round until the gold-medal game. He took good lanes and won his races, he got to the inside with his speed on the puck in transition, and he consistently showcased dangerous offensive zone skills, including an improved shot. It was a tournament for the ages, save the silver medal.

Tim Stuetzle (Ottawa Senators/Team Germany)

I mean, what can you say really? I gave Zegras the edge over Stuetzle for the MVP because of the longevity of USA's run, the point spread I talked about (John-Jason Peterka almost flew under the radar with his 10



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points, equal to Stuetzle's), etc. but Stuetzle executed the tournament's best individual efforts, demonstrated improved commitment defensively, and averaged a titanic 25:40 time on ice per game (first among forwards and second in the tournament) and 4.2 shots per game. He was sensational under tough circumstances.

Defence

Bowen Byram (Colorado Avalanche/Team Canada)

Picking the defencemen for my ballot was tougher this year. Last year, Maple Leafs prospect Rasmus Sandin was the clear No. 1 choice and there were a number of options for the second spot (led by the Flyers' Egor Zamula, Coyotes' Victor Soderstrom, Canadiens' Alexander Romanov, and Red Wings' Moritz Seider). This year there wasn't really either of those things. I think Byram had the best tournament of the bunch, leading Canada in average ice-time at 22:59, creating offensively, and driving results, but I wouldn't say it was as notable a performance as Sandin's was, especially considering Canada's soft pre-gold medal schedule. Still, he played a more physical, tone-setting style, and led the way throughout in all situations.

Ville Heinola (Winnipeg Jets/Team Finland)

This decision was even more difficult, and I debated a couple of other players because I thought he played really poorly in Finland's 4-1 loss to Canada in the round robin and it's hard to put someone who played a bad game in a seven-game tournament on the all-star team. But the Finns made it further than they probably should have in the tournament and Heinola was their most important defenceman for that run. Heinola's game has always been marked by his calculated efficiency and the smoothness with which he operates in all three zones. But I have always wanted him to demonstrate a little more skill, and play a little more aggressively with the puck on his stick. This year, he did that, attacking off of the offensive zone blue line more often than any other defender in the tournament, showcasing his hands (a real asset), using his footwork to his advantage, and hitting some tough seams with NHL-level passing acumen. I was disappointed in how passive he looked in big moments in last year's tournament. That wasn't the case at all. He created a ton of chances, following up on a strong start to the season in Liiga. You can start to see little details emerge, including a curl-and-drag wrist that really pops and some subtle fakes that really open up the game for him. He also created a brilliant highlight-reel goal to tie it 2-2 against Sweden that was called back, and played monster minutes (more than any non-German player) throughout.

Goalie

Devon Levi (Florida Panthers/Team Canada)

His feet, his control (even from his knees when he would get caught in scrambles), the record-tying three shutouts, the composure in the net. All after he wasn't invited to Canada's summer evaluation camp and joined November's selection camp late after a 14-day quarantine due to the travel restrictions for the U.S. college players into Canada. There was so much talk of the strength of the goaltenders the Russians, Americans and Swedes brought in this year's age group, and then Levi looked mostly unflappable. There is literally nothing about his game that I'm willing to pick apart. He rarely pulled out of position, he swallowed his rebounds, and he stuck with shooters one-on-one whenever he was tested. I'm looking forward to watching him at Northeastern over the next few years.

The all-snob team

There isn't a second all-star team for the event, but if there were, consider this my ballot.

Forwards

Matt Boldy (Minnesota Wild/Team USA)

I was this close to putting Boldy on my all-star ballot. Heading into the gold-medal game, when I tweeted my standouts after each of the tournament's games, Boldy was one of the two or three USA players I

listed in four of their six games (actually one more time than Zegras). Boldy became USA head coach Nate Leaman's go-to guy in all situations, often leading the forwards in ice time. He was excellent on the top power-play unit, he was one of (if not the) the team's best penalty killers, and he was always the first go over the boards for key defensive zone situations. Some special performances offensively kept him off of my ballot but he would've been on the tournament all-star team in most other years.

Anton Lundell (Florida Panthers/Team Finland)

Lundell was Finland's best player from start to finish in the tournament, opening the scoring in their first round-robin game against Germany and closing the tournament with a game-tying goal to make it 1-1 and an empty netter to seal the bronze medal win over the Russians at 3-1. He was involved in all facets (including winning 91 of the 130 faceoffs he took, or 70 percent), he drove play with the puck, and he played on the inside. I wrote pre-tournament that if the Finns were going to go on a run to a medal in this event, it was probably because Lundell was going to have played his way onto the tournament all-star team. He didn't disappoint, even if some brilliant performances from other forwards kept him off my ballot.

Connor McMichael (Washington Capitals/Team Canada)

His skating looks improved, with quicker acceleration from a standstill. He handles the puck extremely well with one hand on his stick which helps him go inside-out and cut to his backhand to drive on defenders. And he just gets it. He understands how to play the game and how to adjust to his linemates. Heading into the gold-medal game, he was second to Cozens on the team in shots on goal (22) and points (8), even though the stat keepers had missed an assist of his on the 5-0 empty-net goal against Russia in the semis. He was excellent in all-situations and scored an unassisted shorthanded goal against the Germans. I thought he was going to be a middle-six guy in his draft year but his progression since has given him clear top-six upside. I think he's ready to play in the NHL right now. Whether the Capitals will afford him that opportunity this season is TBD.

Defence

Topi Niemela (Toronto Maple Leafs/Team Finland)

When it was time for me to cast my ballot, Niemela was the tournament's leading defenceman in points. But he did it on a pairing that ceded the toughest matchups to other defencemen (including Heinola's pair with Santeri Hatakka, and often Mikko Kokkonen's pair as well), and with four of his eight points coming on the power play. It was still a great tournament for Niemela, especially as an 18-year-old. He looked comfortable with the puck on his stick under pressure, his neutral zone instincts were impressive on gaps and step-ups, and he didn't look phased by the minutes he did get (which were, to his credit, third among Finland's D). But I don't think he played a role that was significant enough to be named one of the tournament's two best defencemen.

Cam York (Philadelphia Flyers/Team USA)

York had a couple of tough moments that are easy to latch on to and say "that didn't look good" and he still needs to be harder on pucks and more aggressive on his reads but I came away impressed by his tournament on the whole. In the Americans' tough opener against Russia, when their defence caved under the forecheck, he was really the only one who looked comfortable. He was the only USA player to average more than 20 minutes a night, he made some smart plays with the puck which led to chances and goals. I considered Jake Sanderson here instead of York because he was the more consistent player defensively, but they were both good.

Goalie

Spencer Knight (Florida Panthers/Team USA)

Knight didn't look like himself in USA's tournament-opening loss to the Russians, giving up a couple of ugly goals (including one he gave away).



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It was hard for him to really challenge Levi for the all-star team as a result, especially because votes had to be cast before he pitched a gold-medal game shutout. But he was stellar throughout, looking like the composed, technically-brilliant goalie that has made him one of the three best prospects at his position in the sport, with another 22-save shutout against the Czechs, a 27-save shutout against the Swedes, and a strong semifinal performance against Finland in a game where the Americans took five minor penalties and were outshot.

Honourable mentions:

C Alex Turcotte (Los Angeles Kings/Team USA)

C/W Peyton Krebs (Vegas Golden Knights/Team Canada)

RW John-Jason Peterka (Buffalo Sabres/Team Germany)

LHD Jake Sanderson (Ottawa Senators/Team USA)

RHD Jamie Drysdale (Anaheim Ducks/Team Canada)

G Kari Piironen (Team Finland)

Risers

These are players who improved their stock relative to what I thought of them before the tournament or caught my eye when they weren't really on my radar previously.

RHD Drew Helleson (Colorado Avalanche/Team USA)

Team USA had a bit of a lefty-righty conundrum heading into the tournament. When they announced they were bringing nine defencemen just three were righties and just two were expected to play regular minutes. I wasn't sure Helleson, one of those two, should have been. But wow did he ever look like he belonged once the puck dropped. He made smart choices with the puck, his skating looked smoother than a year ago, he surprised me with the number of skill plays he made within the offensive zone, regularly demonstrating soft hands and a willingness to cut to better spots. He didn't play a huge role, finishing fifth among Team USA's defencemen in average ice time, but I thought he was really good in those minutes and a pleasant surprise. Plus his D-zone game has always been there.

LW Brett Berard (New York Rangers/Team USA)

The Americans needed some of their depth forwards to step up to go on a run. Berard and Coyotes prospect John Farinacci became those guys. Berard gets the nod over Farinacci here because I've always been pretty high on Farinacci. Berard found seams, stayed on the puck, played with his usual fearlessness, and also showed nice flashes as a passer. He just goes at whatever lane he's given in the middle of the ice. He's the king of player that puts together full shifts rather than singular moments. He has always been fun to watch, leaving me thinking "he might be a depth guy at the next level" but I'm a smidge more confident in that after his showing than I was before.

C Florian Elias (Team Germany)

Passed up in last year's draft, Elias looked closer to "NHL prospect" than "passenger on a line with Stuetzle and Peterka." He's small but he works hard, he's got skill, and he's sturdy, with a lower, powerful base to his stride that helps him play through contact to keep plays alive. He was often the low guy on that line defensively, he did a good job catching up to them in transition, he's got great hands in tight, and I liked his willingness to chase down loose pucks and forecheck. Will he get picked next summer as an overager? I'm not sure. But his junior track record domestically in Germany and international track record both suggest he's a legitimate player in his age group and I think he's got the tools needed to be a decent pro player, even if that's never in the NHL. He'd be on my radar.

Fallers

These are players who disappointed me relative to my pre-tournament expectations. I have tried to be particularly measured here because I

think there's more to be taken away from those who impress in this kind of a setting than from those who don't. There's more than talent at play in outcomes at the world juniors, including linemates, usage, strength of team and group, and this year the long layoff and quarantines, among other things.

LW/RW Zion Nybeck (Carolina Hurricanes/Team Sweden)

If there was one thing this year's disappointing Swedish team lacked it was skill up front. They had two of the five most talented goalies in the tournament (hell, they had an excellent third-stringer in Calle Clang too!), they had an excellent defence, but after losing Karl Henriksson and William Eklund to COVID protocols, they were thinner on creators than they usually are, putting a lot of pressure on Lucas Raymond, Alexander Holtz, and Noel Gunler to crack open shifts. Had Nybeck stepped up in the same way someone like Canucks prospect Arvid Costmar did, it would've made a difference. But he didn't and was completely unnoticeable throughout. Some of that was about linemates, minutes, and usage for sure but they still needed more out of him.

LHD Daniil Chayka (2021 NHL Draft/Team Russia)

I don't love the idea of being critical of a draft-eligible player in an under-20 tournament but Chayka played a big role for the Russians in their Karjala Cup win, he's on the older side of this year's draft class, and they needed him to be good if they were going to be good — and he wasn't. As the tournament progressed, his minutes faded. He struggled, in particular, in the first two games of the tournament and was scratched after the Russians lost to the Czechs. It's a small sample size but I thought it was notable that he looked pedestrian.

LW Vladislav Firstov (Minnesota Wild/Team Russia)

Firstov had an opportunity, like Nybeck, but on a Russian team that was built heavy but not particularly skilled up front, to make some plays and give his team a bit of a different look. And though his minutes were limited throughout, making it tough on him, he looked completely out of sorts on the ice. The lack of touches because he wasn't getting a regular shift played a role in all likelihood. So did, surely, the fact that this was his first time playing for Russia internationally. But he also played poorly and looked stilted. Something to keep an eye on if he fails to take a step at UConn as a sophomore. Leafs prospect Mikhail Abramov, who was fighting him for roster spot early on, outplayed him.

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The Athletic / Best and worst of the 2021 world juniors: NHL scouts vote for stars and flops

By Corey Pronman

Jan 6, 2021 271

The 2021 IIHF's Under-20 Men's World Championship, aka the world juniors, concluded in Edmonton Tuesday.

This was the all-star ballot I was asked to submit before the gold medal game results were known.

Dylan Cozens, F, Canada (Buffalo)

Tim Stuetzle, F, Germany (Ottawa)

Trevor Zegras, F, United States (Anaheim)

Bowen Byram, D, Canada (Colorado)



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Ville Heinola, D, Finland (Winnipeg)

Devon Levi, G, Canada (Florida)

MVP: Trevor Zegras

I thought the forwards, goalie and Byram were rather straightforward. I struggled on the second defenseman between Heinola and Canada's Jamie Drysdale (Anaheim) but ultimately sided with Heinola. There were several reasonable candidates.

I surveyed around 15 NHL scouts for their all-star ballots before the gold medal game. I also asked each scout to file their biggest disappointment and biggest surprise of the tournament outside of the all-star votes.

The ballots tended to be a similar grouping of players for the forwards and goalie. Every single scout voted for Levi as the top goalie. The same three forwards were mostly voted, except for the odd vote for Sweden's Lucas Raymond (Detroit), and Germany's John-Jason Peterka (Buffalo) and Florian Elias (draft eligible).

The defense was a mixed bag. Most ballots had Byram on them. There were a fair number of votes for American Cam York (Philadelphia), Heinola, Sweden's Victor Soderstrom (Arizona), Finland's Topi Niemela (Toronto) and Drysdale; and some a lone ballot cast for Sweden's Philip Broberg (Edmonton).

The goaltender selection is an obvious point of contention after Spencer Knight's brilliant gold-medal game. Several scouts sent me postgame messages wanting to change their vote. I think it shows that both Knight and Levi were deserving of accolades.

What follows is my personal interpretation of the standouts, pleasant surprises and disappointments of the tournament. This is not related to the scout poll above. If I didn't mention a player it's reasonable to conclude I didn't think they were notably good or poor relative to expectations.

Standouts

Trevor Zegras, C, United States (Anaheim)

Zegras was the best player at the tournament and was named MVP. He has a special offensive brain to go with great hands, and his unique offensive creativity was on display almost every time he touched the puck. He showed his traditional elite playmaking ability and his great shot on a more consistent basis, which I had only seen in flashes in previous years. His foot speed is a concern for NHL purposes.

He's a 6-foot-1 Team USA forward with elite skill and IQ but is slow. He dominated the world juniors but was a point-per-game player in college. If your eye is twitching and you're having flashbacks of Casey Mittelstadt, you're not the only one. But Zegras has more positive indicators, has been a top player over a longer period at various levels and his hockey IQ is something special.

Spencer Knight, G, United States (Florida)

Knight ended the tournament with three shutouts, a .940 save percentage, including a brilliant shutout performance of Canada in the gold medal game. He made difficult saves seem effortless on a consistent basis. His reads were always excellent, his technique almost never broke down and he just seemed to square up pucks all the time, even if the passing play was quick or deceptive or there were odd-man attacks. He showed in the gold-medal game why he was a top-15 pick in his NHL Draft.

Tim Stuetzle, C, Germany (Ottawa)

Germany's U20 program advanced to the medal round for the first time and that was largely due to the performance of Stuetzle. He looked like everything you want in an NHL player. His skating, skill, playmaking and compete level all stood out consistently. He was a driving force when he was on the ice. He's a dynamic player who projects to become a star in the NHL and looks ready to help Ottawa right away.

John-Jason Peterka, RW, Germany (Buffalo)

Germany's success was largely due to the play of Stuetzle, but his linemate, Peterka, was no slouch either. He's not as dynamic as Stuetzle, but Peterka showed a high skill level, an ability to make and finish plays, and an ability to play with pace. I thought Peterka, a high second-round pick by Buffalo, had top-six forward potential in the NHL going into the 2020 draft and his performance at the tournament will maintain that projection for me.

Ville Heinola, D, Finland (Winnipeg)

On a Finnish team that lacked a lot of offensive firepower, Heinola kept the team moving forward and toward the opponent's goal on most nights. He's not a very flashy player and lacks NHL foot speed, but his hockey IQ is fantastic. He made a ton of great decisions and creative plays with the puck, moving it with pace and tilting the play in his favor. The pace of the NHL may be an adjustment for him and keep him from becoming a true top player, but with his IQ he should be a quality player in the league.

Devon Levi, G, Canada (Florida)

I didn't think much of Levi when I saw him last season. I saw a six-foot goalie who was very smart but lacked elite quickness, played in a league that players don't get drafted out of and had a great World Jr. A Challenge to hang his hat on. I figured he may be a late pick or not drafted at all. Sure enough he was one of the last picks of the 2020 draft.

His camp and tournament showed the IQ and athleticism that would translate to higher levels as he was the best goalie at the world juniors. He has more quick-twitch in his movements than I thought previously. His IQ isn't just very good, but elite. He almost never seemed out of position and read tough passing plays at a high level. You don't want to overreact to seven games, so I went back during these past two weeks to watch games from last season and he's way better than I thought a few months ago. This looks like a really solid seventh-round pick by the Panthers. Levi looks like a top goalie prospect.

Among goaltenders with five games in the tournament, the best save percentage has been Carey Price's .961 in 2007, John Gibson's .955 in 2013, Pyotr Kochetkov's .953 in 2019, Andrei Vasilevkiy's .953 in 2012 and Justin Pogge's .952 in 2006. Levi ended with a .964 in seven games.

Dylan Cozens, C, Canada (Buffalo)

Cozens was dominant and a leading scorer in the tournament in a non-flashy manner. I can't say any particular play he made will be an all-time highlight. When you have a guy his size who is a high-end skater who works and can make plays, that will lead to a lot of success. Due to his skating and reach, he's always on pucks, creating turnovers, pushing the pace in transition, and showing enough skill, playmaking and finishing ability to capitalize on the possession he could generate. He has a skill set that will translate well to the higher levels.

Bowen Byram, D, (Colorado) and Jamie Drysdale, D, (Anaheim) pairing

Byram was the best defenseman in the tournament, but I thought in general the top Canadian pair of him and Drysdale were so good throughout the tournament that it was part of the reason I wanted to give Drysdale my other All-Star vote. They are both elite skaters and controlled the puck when they were on the ice. Byram's physicality to go along with his skating popped. I wouldn't say either is a dynamic skill type, but they had their moments with the puck where they made creative plays, particularly Byram. Drysdale also worked his way from off the power play to heading the second unit by the second half of the tournament.

Roni Hirvonen, C, Finland (Toronto) and Anton Lundell, C (Florida)

Hirvonen and Anton Lundell (were the drivers for Finland's offense. For Lundell, as a top-15 pick who has put up big numbers in Liiga, he was as good as expected. He made a lot of tough plays, he won puck battles and his skill popped more consistently than it has versus men. His skating remains an issue, but I could see him becoming a second-line



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center in the NHL. For Hirvonen, who doesn't have Lundell's track record in terms of pro production and draft pedigree, he was very impressive. Hirvonen showed his playmaking and his skill, but also worked hard and created chances through his effort and going to the tough areas. His size and quickness aren't great, but there are positive indicators in his skill set, and between the club and international levels he continues to produce wherever he goes.

Matthew Boldy, LW, United States (Minnesota)

Boldy did everything for Team USA. He made a lot of skilled plays at even strength. He created chances. He scored goals. He played the first power play and killed penalties. He's a player with elite skill but it was very encouraging to see how hard he worked in the tournament. He has some foot speed concerns in terms of his NHL projection, but he seems to check almost every other box you want in a very good NHL player with the look of a true top prospect.

Alex Turcotte, C, United States (Los Angeles)

Turcotte was more reminiscent in this tournament of the Turcotte you saw as a U18. He was relentless with his compete level, winning a lot of battles and playing with pace. He showed very good hands, made plays to his teammates and created around the hard areas of the ice. After a concerning 2019-20 between college and his last World Junior, this was very reassuring to see. He still might not be an overly dynamic player at his size for a No. 5 pick, but he looked the part of a guy who could project as a quality top-six forward again.

Jake Sanderson, D, United States (Ottawa)

Sanderson was not all that impactful to start the tournament, there were games where he looked very bland. But as the games became higher leverage, in particular, his play in the gold medal game, I thought he showed why he is so valuable. His excellent skating, his high compete level, and his ability to transition pucks with his feet and first pass were on display when he needed to shut down top players. The pair of he and Drew Helleson continued to impress as the tournament progressed. It was no coincidence Sanderson led Team USA in time on ice in the gold medal game as they tried to hold onto a 2-0 lead.

Pleasant Surprises

Brett Berard, LW, United States (New York Rangers)

Berard was excellent when I saw him in the first half of 2019-20, showing a lot of skill and energy. He then faded in the second half, leading to him being a mid-round pick. When he was first added to the USA roster I thought there could have been better options, but he quickly showed he was the right choice. Berard brought a lot of speed and hustle to his shifts to go along with some offense. He looks like a nice fifth-round pick with a solid chance to play at the bottom of an NHL lineup.

Juraj Slafkovsky, LW, Slovakia (2022 draft eligible)

Slafkovsky is a top name in his age group. When I saw him before, I saw the great combination of size, skill and IQ. I didn't think he would be ready as a 16-year-old to play a featured role at this tournament for Slovakia, being on the first power play and having a lot of the offense run through him. It was an impressive display, far above what I have seen before of Slafkovsky. When it comes time for his NHL Draft discussion, scouts will be concerned significantly by his skating, but this tournament was an argument in favor of keeping him in mind over the next 18 months as a top player for the 2022 draft class.

Zakhar Bardakov, RW, Russia (2021 draft eligible)

Bardakov never stood out to me in previous viewings. I never saw the speed or skill to be a relevant prospect. He stood out in this event because of his size, physicality and effort level, and showing enough offense to complement those elements. He generated a lot of scoring chances for Russia and was always in the mix of things. Scouts took notice of his play, and it's quite possible he gets picked later in the upcoming draft as a third-year eligible.

Elmer Soderblom, LW, Sweden (Detroit)

Soderblom has been rising since he was a sixth-round pick by Detroit in 2019. He's a very large human who has tremendous puck skills. His ability to go one-on-one against opponents and make tough plays in small areas was consistently on display as one of Sweden's most dangerous offensive players. He hasn't gotten it done versus men primarily due to his poor skating, which will be his main issue in the NHL, but he's certainly a player trending up and looks like a guy who could play NHL games one day.

Drew Helleson, D, United States (Colorado)

Helleson entered the tournament as the seventh defenseman for Team USA and by the end of it was logging the high-leverage minutes. He's not a flashy player, but he's a big, mobile defenseman who can make stops and whose puck-moving ability looked a lot better than I've seen previously. The offense has always been my question with Helleson and I don't think it's his main strength, but his first pass ability looked solid, especially as the tournament progressed.

Topi Niemela, D, Finland (Toronto)

Given that Niemela has never been known as an elite skill type and that he wasn't on the first power-play all tournament, it was rather significant the 2020 third-round pick by Toronto found a way to be a leading defenseman at the tournament in points. Niemela is a very intelligent and mobile defenseman who showed he can be relied on at both ends of the rink, and tilt possession when he is on the ice. He had flashes of great offensive creativity that led to chances but in the NHL his offense will come from skating and passing the puck up in transition while being reliable defensively.

John Farinacci, C, United States (Arizona)

Farinacci was very good at Harvard last season, but there were times in the USHL this season you wondered if he would even make the USA team. He not only made it but was one of its leaders in almost every offensive category. He showed great skill and compete level, getting chances in the hard areas of the ice while also killing penalties for the United States. His skating isn't great but otherwise, he has a lot of the pieces you want in an NHL player.

Juuso Parssinen, C, Finland (Nashville)

Parssinen was a seventh-round pick of the Predators but he looked more like a second- or third-round type at this event. When you have a center with size, with very good hands, who can pass and shoot the puck, that's an appealing package. He played big minutes for Finland on both special teams. His skating is just OK, which is why he wasn't a high pick, but he looks like a real NHL prospect and someone Predators fans should know about.

Brock Faber, D, United States (Los Angeles)

Faber's tournament and the beginning of his season at Minnesota has been quite good and impressive for the second-round pick. He played a bigger role than I thought. His great skating and physicality allowed him to play against good players as an 18-year-old. The question on Faber has always been how much offense and creativity he has. I think his first pass skills are good enough, along with his skating, to consider him a quality NHL prospect.

Disappointments

Quinton Byfield, C, Canada (Los Angeles)

Byfield had the massive six-point game vs. Switzerland, but overall in the tournament and particularly versus the better teams, he wasn't all that impactful. He showed his skating and physicality but his game lacked skill and playmaking, providing evidence to the scouts who last season questioned whether he had the hockey sense to be a No. 2 pick.

Some may say that is an overreaction to one tournament, but this isn't one tournament. It's this tournament, last year's tournament, the Hlinka



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Gretzky Cup and the U17 challenge where he's either underwhelmed or been good but didn't look like a true elite player at the international level. I still love the player, but it would be nice to see him get it done at a higher level of competition.

Marco Rossi, C, Austria (Minnesota)

Rossi's tournament wasn't memorable. He didn't score a point between the four round-robin games and pre-tournament game vs. Switzerland, and in Austria's games he didn't look like much of a factor in terms of generating entries and chances. The obvious factor to consider is how his team got steam-rolled in puck possession. That's a very relevant fact, but it's not impossible to stand out at this tournament without a supporting cast. Nikolaj Ehlers, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Joachim Blichfeld did it for Denmark in previous years. Stuetzle and Peterka did it for Germany this year with half an active roster for most of the tournament. For a player like Rossi, whose main concern in the OHL for his NHL projection was his skating and pace to go along with his size, you would have liked to see him make more of an impact in this higher pace environment.

Bjornfot and Broberg were leaned on to play big minutes for Sweden, and while they were fine, I can't say the two first-round picks stood out. The caveat here would be that Broberg was visibly injured in the latter half of the tournament so that could have played a part in his poor performance. For both of them it's a continued trend from this season and prior seasons of their game lacking offense and puck-moving ability. Both are very good skaters who have their moments with the puck and can defend due to their skating, but they may lack the ability to impact a game.

Jack Quinn, RW, Canada (Buffalo)

Quinn had a decent number of points, but it was hard to call him a main factor for the Canadian team. When scouts, who were skeptics of the 2020 No. 8 pick, watched him last season, the concern was he looked very skilled in the OHL and he works hard, but if his skating would translate to higher pace environments. At the world juniors, he wasn't as impactful when the game around him got quicker. He was fantastic in the last three or so months of his OHL season, but there were certainly corners of the hockey world that thought he'd never been a top player before then and those concerns haven't been alleviated.

Yaroslav Askarov, G, Russia (Nashville)

Askarov wasn't bad, but he wasn't good. For Russia to succeed he needed to be a top player in the tournament and he wasn't. This is now three of the last four international tournaments he's played in (two world juniors and the U18 five nations in February) where he's been ordinary with a fantastic Karjala Cup sandwiched between them. He's a very quick goalie, but I've always found his quickness controlled, and his hockey sense elite in how he challenges and positions himself. In this tournament, he was much more erratic than I'm used to seeing with his reads and decisions, and created chaos for himself more than I've seen before.

Simon Holmstrom, LW, Sweden (New York Islanders)

Holmstrom was one I was unsure to list here because he was a point-per-game player, but he didn't look that noticeable consistently and only generated three shots on goal. I like his skill and playmaking, and he had occasional high-end flashes, but his game lacked speed and energy. His game is very much built around what he does in the offensive zone, but he lacks the speed to get into the zone with control, which concerns me as to how it will translate to the NHL.

Yegor Chinakhov, RW, Russia (Columbus)

This is a tough one since Chinakhov was injured midway through his third game of the tournament and came back for the semifinal. There were a lot of eyes in the NHL scouting community on him after the splash Columbus made picking the second-year eligible forward 21st in 2020, claiming he was top 10 on their board and his stat line read one goal, zero assists and eight shots in 3.5 games. Chinakhov got some chances,

but his speed, skill and playmaking didn't really stand out in any significant way. He's a good player and has had a very good 19-year-old season in the KHL, but I can't say he validated the pick in this tournament.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.07.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Training Camp Day 4: Eichel and Hall, together at last

Emily Sadler@EmmySadler

January 6, 2021, 2:34 PM

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

The Columbus Blue Jackets opened up Wednesday's events with the announcement that they've signed forward Oliver Bjorkstrand to a five-year extension worth \$27 million. The 25-year-old, who was slated to be a restricted free agent after this upcoming season, will now remain in Columbus through the 2025-26 campaign. Bjorkstrand led the Blue Jackets in goals last season, tallying 21 in 49 games.

Goals were tough to come by for Columbus last year — the team ranked 28th league-wide in goals scored in 2019-20 with 180. Drumming up more offence this year will be a major point of focus and securing Bjorkstrand is a step in that direction, especially as management embarks upon what could be a tough season of navigating the Pierre-Luc Dubois situation.

Jack's back

The Buffalo Sabres welcomed captain Jack Eichel to the ice Wednesday, his first time practising with the team since training camp opened. Eichel was listed as day-to-day last week after sustaining a minor injury while training.

This means we'll finally get to see Eichel and Taylor Hall practise together, getting the wheels in motion on what is expected to be a lucrative partnership between the dynamic offensive stars in Buffalo. With Eichel sidelined and Victor Olofsson also out (he's back Wednesday, too) the Sabres can finally make some strides building chemistry amongst their top forwards.

Sabres' Girgensons sidelined for season

It looks like Zemgus Girgensons' season is over before it even started. The forward went down awkwardly during Monday's intrasquad scrimmage, and on Wednesday the Sabres announced he'll be sidelined about six months following successful surgery on his hamstring. A tough blow for the club, and a heartbreaking development for Girgensons, who hasn't played since March and will now have to wait much longer to return to play.

Here's the incident:

Can Anderson find fit with Washington?

Craig Anderson signed a PTO with the Capitals on Dec. 27, a few months after his decade-long tenure with Ottawa ended with the rebuilding Senators letting him walk in free agency.

The Capitals came calling after Henrik Lundqvist, the veteran netminder they initially signed to complement first-time starter Ilya Samsonov,



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announced he was stepping away from the game due to a heart condition.

Anderson, 39, spoke with reporters on Wednesday about his extended off-season and the opportunity to join the Capitals:

Another new Capitals veteran also spoke with the media on Wednesday. Newcomer Zdeno Chara, who hit the ice for the first time with Washington on Tuesday and joined the main group on Wednesday, told reporters it was "exciting" to put on the Capitals sweater and was embracing the opportunity to get to know his new teammates — including stars and longtime Eastern Conference foes like Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, and John Carlson.

"We know each other well, playing against each other. We had some good battles, obviously the two teams the last few years always battled for top spots in our conference."

"It's been very exciting to be around them," Chara continued. "Looking forward to playing with them."

So far, Chara has been skating alongside defenceman Nick Jensen -- an opportunity that had Jensen a little awestruck.

The Toronto Maple Leafs hit the ice Wednesday for their first intrasquad scrimmage, and did so without the injured Alex Kerfoot. Kerfoot left Tuesday's practice after being "banged up" but few details were released about his status. Head coach Sheldon Keefe told reporters the forward is "doing well" and is listed as day-to-day without a timeframe set for his return just yet.

Boston Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask has one thing on his mind as he prepares for the upcoming season: Playing hockey.

In other words, the fact that his eight-year deal is about to come to an end — it expires at the end of 2020-21 — isn't top of mind.

During his media availability on Wednesday, Rask acknowledged that Bruins GM Don Sweeney "has a lot on his plate right now" as the team prepares for the shortened season, and said he's comfortable with where he stands.

"I'm comfortable with where we are right now. I just want to go out there and start the season off right and kind of get in a good groove and play good hockey personally and as a team. And then if the contract talks happen during the season then so be it. If they don't, then we'll just wait it out and see what happens," Rask told reporters.

"I have no intention of playing anywhere else than the Bruins," Rask said when asked about his desire to stay. "So if I'm good enough to play one, two, three more years then so be it, and if not then so be it. So, that's where my head's at."

Nate Schmidt is looking right at home in Vancouver, already laughing and pushing a few buttons — jokingly, of course — with teammates and coaches at Canucks camp.

Fresh off his first Vezina Trophy victory, Winnipeg Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck is focused on his next goal:

"Now the only one that matters is the Stanley Cup," he told reporters during his training camp media availability on Wednesday. "I'd love to win another Vezina, that would be great, but it's time. I'm in my prime, this team's in its prime — it is time to win a Stanley Cup and everyday has to be building towards that. It doesn't have to happen today, but tomorrow's gotta be a better version of yourself than you are today."

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1181683 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Romanov making strong impression on new teammates and coach Julien

Eric Engels@EricEngels

January 6, 2021, 7:46 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — I had to see it to believe it.

Not that I didn't trust the numbers the Canadiens had provided — the height and weight of each player and all the other relevant statistics sent to media after physical and medical testing was completed at Bell Sports Complex in Brossard Sunday — it's just that when you read a 20-year-old player has gained an inch in height and 27 pounds, you figure your eyes will offer some sort of confirmation.

After a few days of watching Alexander Romanov (formerly five-foot-11, 181 pounds and now six-foot, 208 pounds) I can't say with any degree of certainty if the numbers have been inflated, but it doesn't appear they have been. The kid, who turned 21 on Wednesday, looks as big as the Canadiens say he is.

As for the dramatic weight (muscle) gain, Romanov's agent, Dan Milstein, told me it's more likely his stats hadn't been updated since the 2018 draft combine.

Regardless, that's a lot of growth over a short period of time.

I digress...

Romanov also looks about as good as the Canadiens brass has made him out to be. We'll see if that still proves true when the games begin but, so far, I see a fluid skating stride, a very engaged player who's anything but out of sorts with all the new things he's being exposed to, and a player who does just about everything well at both ends.

But don't just take my word for it. Take Joel Edmundson's.

"He's good," said Edmundson of Romanov after Wednesday's practice. "Smooth skater, good hands and he puts in the work... He's a young kid that's got a lot of skill and he's hungry, so I'm excited to see what he does this season."

Most everyone in these parts is, and I'm certainly intrigued.

Romanov, who was drafted 38th overall in 2018, came to Montreal all but guaranteed by the coaching staff to already be in possession of a spot on the Canadiens' blue line — and based purely on the impression he made at a private combine the Canadiens held prior to his draft, dominant performances at two world junior championships, some game footage from two seasons with the KHL's CSKA Moscow and a few practices in the Toronto bubble this past August.

There appears to be universal confidence within the Canadiens organization that he's going to step into the lineup and make an immediate impact, and given that we have a fairly limited window to see what all the fuss is about, I've been watching him very closely since this 10-day training camp transitioned to the ice on Monday.

With each passing moment, the picture has gotten clearer — from noticing how familiar Romanov immediately seemed with players he had only spent a couple of weeks around in the playoffs to watching him jump right into the power-play rotation on Day 2 to everything we saw and heard on Day 3.

On Day 3, Romanov was the first player to step on the ice ahead of a special teams practice. When the drills began, he was no longer rotating in and out with Victor Mete; he was quarterbacking the second unit on his own.

And after that wrapped, Romanov headed over to the main ice surface for regular practice and assumed his position to the right of Brett Kulak on what's expected to be Montreal's third defence pairing out of the gate.



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An hour later, with everyone filing off the ice, there was Romanov — taking a few extra shots after the extra-shot portion of practice had already ended.

First player on, last player off.

And then the interviews started with Edmundson, and then Tyler Toffoli, and Josh Anderson, and finally head coach Claude Julien.

When Toffoli and Anderson were asked for their impressions of the young defenceman, there was so much congruence between their answers it was as if both of them were regurgitating a discussion they had already had with each other about Romanov.

"He plays at 100 percent every single time," said Toffoli of Romanov. "Even the little drills — you can see he's going hard, he's finishing his checks and you have to earn every piece of ice with him."

"He plays games like he does in practice," said Anderson, who obviously meant that Romanov practises as if there's as much on the line as there is in games.

Those two answers made me wonder if Romanov was ticking some players off with how hard he was going during these first few skates. I even asked Anderson if someone needed to say something to Romanov to get him to tone it down a bit — with him being a young player unaccustomed to NHL practice culture — but Anderson was all for what he was seeing.

"I think he just has good habits," Anderson said. "I think that's what you have to have as a professional hockey player."

"Practices have been pretty high-paced and guys have been going pretty hard, and you can see that. When you see a couple of guys working hard, it follows to the other guys to do the same thing. That's the advice I would give him is keep going and keep working hard."

Jeff Marek and Elliott 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.

I'm not sure if Julien was watching these exchanges from his office, but the coach offered this up after he was asked if anything stood out about Romanov over the last three days.

"He's a really dialed-in athlete and everything he does on the ice every day is at 100 per cent, and that's how he's been his whole career, his whole life. A guy who just loves the game, comes in and works hard every day. So, I like seeing that."

"There's players that are really intense that can be reckless, but there's players that are intense and it's because it's just the way they play and what they do out there is calculated. So that's where I see Romanov's practice habits and his intensity and all that we've seen. I like that, and I'm sure his teammates enjoy it as well."

It's the type of stuff you want to hear about any player, but certainly about one who's come in with high expectations.

It's obvious that Romanov isn't taking anything for granted, and that's the impression he's made so far.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.07.2021

1181684 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs notebook: Nick Robertson 'in a fight' to make the cut

Luke Fox@lukefoxjukebox

January 6, 2021, 4:45 PM

TORONTO — The two distinct training groups crossed streams for the first time on Day 4 of Toronto Maple Leafs training camp.

The club mixed its NHL and AHL/taxi groups and held an intrasquad scrimmage after a brief practice (and, yes, Auston Matthews scored).

From outside the Ford Performance Centre, here's what we learned from the team's decidedly lighthearted Zoom sessions.

Hot-Take Holl

Now comfortably ensconced in the Maple Leafs' top four, Justin Holl is no longer afraid to speak on the important matters during this, our golden age of streaming entertainment.

"True Detective Season 1 is the best show of all time," Holl said, unequivocally. "Best show of all time."

The D-man said his stance on the matter would "trigger" former teammate Trevor Moore, who believes a one-off miniseries should be excluded from television's GOAT debate.

Hey! What about The Sopranos?

"Kind of a parent show, you know," Holl replied. "An old-person show."

Ouch.

Believe it or not, this sidebar discussion does relate to hockey. Holl has himself a new stallmate at camp, Finland's Mikko Lehtonen, and has been blown away at how well the Canadian newcomer speaks English. "I know I'd be in trouble if I were to go to a foreign country and have to speak their language," Holl said.

The two D-men have been exchanging tips on which American shows to binge because, well, what else are you going to do at night? (Pro tip: Skip Season 2, but True Detective Season 3 is also excellent.)

Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson took a backseat Tuesday, however, in favour of the world juniors gold medal game.

Proud Minnesotan Holl watched the championship with Canadian roommate Mitch Marner.

"This Zegras guy's unreal," Holl beamed. "The message he sent before the game was crazy, but he backed it up. So, it was fun to watch and, you know, go USA!"

Robertson misses out on gold, prefers blue and white

One notable teenage American phenom who did not win a gold medal Tuesday night?

Nick Robertson.

In conjunction with Kyle Dubas, his agent and USA Hockey, Robertson elected to pour his entire focus into Maple Leafs camp instead of repping his country and flying east to catch up like Tim Stutzle, Dylan Cozens, et al.

"He's been here in Toronto right since things finished in the [playoff] bubble, and this guy has been absolutely all-in and committed to make himself a better player," Keefe said.

Fun fact: Robertson scored the Leafs' most recent goal at 5-on-5.

Not-so-fun fact: Robertson finds himself on Toronto's non-NHL "B" squad at training camp and appears to be on track to open the season as a taxi-squad option. (That said, Toronto used 22 different forwards in 2019-20, so it's a safe bet he'll get his shot.)

"He knows he's in a fight here to make our team," Keefe said. "With how much he's put into it all, I'm not so sure he would've forgiven us if we put him in a situation where he had to miss an opportunity to compete in



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camp. But I know that he's a proud American and loved his experience with the world juniors there [in 2020].

"He's as focused an individual I've seen in the community of hockey, and he really wants to be part of this camp."

Meeting Barabanov

Captain John Tavares describes newcomer Alexander "Bears" Barabanov as "very hungry and excited for the opportunity to play in the NHL... really competitive on the puck and never seems to quit on it."

The KHL import is set to make his North American debut on the left side of a fourth line loaded with wisdom in the form of Jason Spezza and Wayne Simmonds.

Barabanov, 26, and his wife made Toronto their home months ago. He's started to soak up the English language and took in the sights — Casa Loma, Art Gallery of Ontario, Niagara Falls — prior to the provincial lockdown.

Easing his transition to the club are skills development consultant Nik Antropov, who served as Barabanov's interpreter Wednesday, and Ilya Mikheyev.

"We played together with the [Russian] national team," said Mikheyev, resistant to using an interpreter. "He's a very good guy. He's very good at protecting the puck in the corner, and he's a strong guy too."

Soup vs. Soupy

If there is a more positive personality on the Leafs roster than backup goalie Jack "Soupy" Campbell, he must still be hiding in quarantine.

How's this for answer?

Asked if he was the slightest bit envious that teammate Ilya "Souperman" Mikheyev is the one landing liquid-lunch endorsements and cashing those Campbell Soup Company cheques, Campbell broke out one of his easy, wide smiles.

"I'm more jealous of the people who get to work with him on the commercials, because he's such a good time," Campbell said. "He's got a charismatic demeanour. I'm happy he got the commercial. Maybe we can do it together sometime."

Mikheyev found shooting the commercial quite a challenge, but it was nice the soup giant hired his actual mother in a supporting role.

"It's much easier to play hockey," Mikheyev admitted.

"It's terrific," Keefe said of the advertisement. "He's got a lot of personality, and I think he's used that to gain the attention of our fans."

"Part of the beauty of being a Maple Leaf is you get that type of recognition."

One-Timers

With Alexander Kerfoot day-to-day with an undisclosed injury he suffered during Tuesday's practice, Pierre Engvall received the next-man-up promotion to take reps with the main NHL group Wednesday... Defenceman Joseph Duszak was added to the training camp roster. The undrafted 23-year-old right shot impressed with 53 points in 57 games split between the Growlers and Marlies last season... For those scoring at home, Team Blue destroyed Team White 6-0 in the club's first of two scrimmages. "Our process was good, but a couple structural breakdowns. We'll clean that up," vowed Team White spokesman Justin Holl, with a wink... A hint at the power rankings Keefe will use in shootouts? Auston Matthews, John Tavares, Mitch Marner, William Nylander, Jimmy Vesey and Jason Spezza were the six shooters selected to practise the extra-point dill. Remember: That skills competition will be more important this season with every single game coming against a division rival.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.07.2021

1181685 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Stanley Cup contender tiers: Who has the best chance to win in 2021?

Ryan Dixon@dixononsports

January 6, 2021, 11:57 AM

The chase for an NHL championship is increasingly defined by unfavourable math in that, while there remains only one Stanley Cup, the number of clubs that appear title-worthy seems to grow by the season.

Even 10 years ago, when you really drilled down, you could usually count the number of teams that had a legit chance to win it all with five fingers. Now, with ever-creeping parity driven by the salary cap and young players making more of an immediate impact than ever, you need both hands to catch all the contenders.

As such, the purpose of today's exercise is to identify the teams that could conceivably skate off with the 2021 Cup. We've highlighted three no-doubters, six clubs that could catch a wave to do it and a bunch more that — no matter how hard you squint — don't have an in-focus path to a parade.

With puck-drop on the season just a week away, the hard question for every contender out there is, can we really be the last team standing?

Tier One: Hard Yes

Colorado Avalanche: Locked and loaded. Questions about a crunch-time goalie duo of Philipp Grubauer and Pavel Francouz are fair, but not nearly enough to besmirch this club's standing as one of the very best in the league.

Tampa Bay Lightning: The salary cap clouds have cleared and even with recent scoring champ Nikita Kucherov shelved for the regular season, there's more than enough torque here to land a cushy Central Division playoff spot. This team won the Cup without Steven Stamkos in the lineup; if Kucherov comes back from hip surgery at some point in the post-season, the 2021 Bolts could be a superior squad to the one that lifted the Cup three months ago.

Vegas Golden Knights: While the Knights belong in the top tier, we'll draw a faint line between them and the two clubs listed above only because Vegas's centre depth doesn't match up with Tampa or Colorado. That said, the Golden Knights landed the biggest UFA fish in Alex Pietrangolo and are getting after the '21 Cup as hard as anyone.

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.

Tier Two: Soft Yes

St. Louis Blues: The 2019 champs lost their captain to Vegas in the off-season, but new additions Torey Krug and Mike Hoffman are going to help create goals. Still, the Blues' path to the Cup final goes through Colorado and Vegas in the West Division. Goalie Jordan Binnington will have to be the version of himself we saw during St. Louis's magical run two years ago.

Boston Bruins: Speaking of 2019, you really wonder if this iteration of the Bruins missed their chance by losing Game 7 at home to the Blues. Nobody is going to bet against the leadership and infrastructure here. At



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some point, though, members of the secondary cast have to slide to centre stage and thrive.

Toronto Maple Leafs: This is about looking six months into the future, not dwelling on four years of springtime disappointment. Collectively, the Leafs are like a slumping sniper that just needs to bag one (in this case, one playoff round win) to bust the dam and hope a flood follows.

Philadelphia Flyers: Like the Leafs, there's grow-an-inch potential for this crew. Some of the young guys struggled in the bubble, but there's nice balance throughout the lineup and an emerging stud goalie in Carter Hart.

Pittsburgh Penguins: It was really tempting to bump this club down to the just-can't-see-it tier. Pittsburgh has won a single playoff series since taking the 2017 Cup. But this won't be the space where we close the book on a motivated Sidney Crosby.

Washington Capitals: See above. The Caps have been one-and-done each of the past two years after celebrating a long-time-coming championship in 2018. Ovechkin and Co. come with questions, but another summer-long party can't be ruled out yet.

Dallas Stars: Tyler Seguin is likely out until April and Ben Bishop is probably on the shelf until mid-March. There's a chance the defending Western Conference champs will just be hitting their stride when the playoffs begin, but I think it's more likely this is a down year after last summer's march to the final.

Carolina Hurricanes: This is about substandard goaltending and nothing else. Carolina's roster in front of Petr Mrazek and James Reimer is Cup-worthy. If they can improve the crease between now and the April 12 trade deadline, they could do this thing.

Calgary Flames: Like a few teams in this block, a deep run absolutely feels in play. But this group has disappointed enough times to question whether winning four rounds is a real possibility.

Nashville Predators: The defence corps remains a huge strength and it will be interesting to see what Juuse Saros can do as a starter. The forward mix, though, just isn't inspiring.

Vancouver Canucks: Last summer's playoff success was a wonderful start for a team that will probably be a tier or two higher very soon. That said, it's still a work in progress.

New York Islanders: The definition of a tough out, just not enough talent to do anything more than make the top contenders really work for it.

Winnipeg Jets: The top of the lineup is loaded with great forwards and the crease is locked down by reigning Vezina winner Connor Hellebuyck. The blue line, though, is going to take a while to rebuild after losing Jacob Trouba, Dustin Byfuglien, Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot in the summer of 2019.

Edmonton Oilers: The Oilers are doing a nice job of filling things out around Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, but losing Oscar Klefbom for the season really stings and the goaltending is just too big of a question mark.

New York Rangers: The darlings of the NHL Draft Lottery surely have big things ahead, but we're not there yet.

Montreal Canadiens: The Habs haven't qualified for the playoffs under a 16-team format since 2017, so this is a walk-before-you-run situation.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.07.2021

1181686 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' Hoglander sparkling in first bid to earn spot with big club in 2021

Iain MacIntyre@imacSportsnet

January 7, 2021, 1:25 AM

VANCOUVER — The Vancouver Canucks are three days closer to the National Hockey League season than when training camp began, and so is Swedish rookie Nils Hoglander.

The five-foot-eight dynamo, a just-turned-20-year-old second-round pick who has been playing with Rogle of the Swedish Hockey League, has sparked in his first attempt to make the Canucks.

Wednesday's simulated game — three periods at night after full morning skates, NHL officiating — was supposed to be another hurdle to challenge Hoglander. It looked more like a curb. The added speed and intensity of the scrimmage didn't expose weaknesses in Hoglander's game, but reinforced his obvious offensive strengths.

Playing with captain Bo Horvat and Tanner Pearson, Hoglander set up one goal and scored a beauty himself as his Whites beat the Blues 6-4 at Rogers Arena. He got stronger as the game went on and was probably the most dangerous player on either team in the third period when, in one memorable sequence, he pilfered the puck from Canucks star Elias Pettersson, which is like stealing a painting from the Louvre, only to have his countryman charge back after him.

With a day off Thursday and one final simulated game on Saturday, the Canucks are nearly halfway through their entire preparation to open the 56-game NHL season next Wednesday in Edmonton. Hoglander looks more than halfway there.

GOALIE UNION GRIEVANCE

Skaters would like a couple of exhibition games but, honestly, especially for veteran players, they can get by without them. But the lack of an actual pre-season is incredibly tough for goalies.

Apart from the obvious lack of reps, goaltenders miss NHL game speed and the vital practice of seeing and tracking pucks, which is why every poor goal or five-alarm save they make in a scrimmage feels somehow significant.

Neither Braden Holtby nor Thatcher Demko looked sharp in Wednesday's 54-minute game and Demko, especially, struggled early as he gave up three quick goals. His body language was telling on a couple of them.

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GROWING ADAM GAUDETTE



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 7, 2021

No matter how much you try to diet, you do not want Adam Gaudette's weight-loss program.

For years, the Canucks centre has been trying to add weight to his lanky six-foot-one frame. Diet and exercise often did not do it. The 24-year-old struggled to eat full meals, sometimes struggled to keep the food he had consumed in his stomach. He just wasn't hungry.

Gaudette figured it was metabolism, just the way he was.

But last fall, as his weight declined again despite Gaudette eating and training as a professional athlete should, the forward from Braintree, Mass., was finally diagnosed with the help of a nutritionist.

"I discovered I had some sort of stomach problem that prevents me from eating full meals," Gaudette told reporters before the Canucks' full scrimmage Wednesday night. "I would get sick in the mornings randomly. And this has been going on for years. And it's always been a struggle for me to put weight on. But my nutritionist has caught it. We're attacking it, we're working with the doctors here in Van. I've got a great team around me, supporting me right now. And it's going to take a pretty long time to get back on track and get to where I want to be. But we caught this thing now and I'm thrilled about that because I just feel much better.

"The best way to describe it is it's like a yeast infection in my stomach. It... makes me feel nauseous, sick, not hungry. I've been like this since high school. I just thought I was always a kid who never really liked to eat, would never get hungry, but it turns out I had something wrong with me. It's just such a relief that we figured it out. My whole world has changed for the better."

Gaudette, who did not name his medical condition, has never missed a game due to his stomach problems. But adding weight to support his increasing strength has always been a problem.

He was listed at 170 pounds when he was selected in the fifth round of the 2015 entry draft, but may have been lighter than that. He got stronger at Northeastern University, where his game blossomed and he became a Hobey Baker winner and U.S. college scoring champion, and in two years of professional hockey had worked his way up to 186 pounds last season.

"(I'm) not as much as I weighed last year, but I definitely got stronger throughout the off-season, quicker," Gaudette said. "I have the numbers and the weights to prove it in the gym, and I feel it on the ice. But I'm definitely lighter than I want to be."

Gaudette won an NHL lineup spot last season and had 12 goals and 33 points in 59 games despite modest nightly ice time of 12:23. He is playing at training camp on a line with Antoine Roussel and Zack MacEwen.

Veteran grinder Roussel, who made the nicest pass of the scrimmage with a behind-the-back set up to Hoglander, often delights reporters with his interesting, sometimes offbeat, views. After the morning skates, he said one of the benefits of the all-Canadian division will be a bigger stage in Eastern Canada for young Canucks stars like Pettersson and Hughes.

"I feel like sometimes like all the attention goes on to (Auston) Matthews, (Mitch) Marner, even (Nick) Suzuki now," Roussel, who lives in Quebec in the off-season, said in his Zoom call. "It's a big attention. I don't think our guys sometimes get the attention they deserve — like our best players. They could be in a better position to market themselves as the best players in the league."

Canuck coach Travis Green offered a rebuttal.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' Hoglander sparkling in first bid to earn spot with big club in 2021

Iain MacIntyre@imacSportsnet

January 7, 2021, 1:25 AM

VANCOUVER — The Vancouver Canucks are three days closer to the National Hockey League season than when training camp began, and so is Swedish rookie Nils Hoglander.

The five-foot-eight dynamo, a just-turned-20-year-old second-round pick who has been playing with Rogle of the Swedish Hockey League, has sparked in his first attempt to make the Canucks.

Wednesday's simulated game — three periods at night after full morning skates, NHL officiating — was supposed to be another hurdle to challenge Hoglander. It looked more like a curb. The added speed and intensity of the scrimmage didn't expose weaknesses in Hoglander's game, but reinforced his obvious offensive strengths.

Playing with captain Bo Horvat and Tanner Pearson, Hoglander set up one goal and scored a beauty himself as his Whites beat the Blues 6-4 at Rogers Arena. He got stronger as the game went on and was probably the most dangerous player on either team in the third period when, in one memorable sequence, he pilfered the puck from Canucks star Elias Pettersson, which is like stealing a painting from the Louvre, only to have his countryman charge back after him.

With a day off Thursday and one final simulated game on Saturday, the Canucks are nearly halfway through their entire preparation to open the 56-game NHL season next Wednesday in Edmonton. Hoglander looks more than halfway there.

GOALIE UNION GRIEVANCE

Skaters would like a couple of exhibition games but, honestly, especially for veteran players, they can get by without them. But the lack of an actual pre-season is incredibly tough for goalies.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 7, 2021

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

Elliotte Friedman@FriedgeHNIC

January 5, 2021, 11:30 AM

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 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.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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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

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.

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); Aleksii 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 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.



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"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.

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 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 HNHC 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



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corn flakes. "Hasek," he said dismissively, so disappointed in my answer. I laughed. RIP.

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1181689 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Tkachuk ready for role as North Division's most reviled player

Eric Francis@EricFrancis

January 6, 2021, 9:09 PM

A week away from embarking on a national barnstorming tour of sorts, Matthew Tkachuk showed up at the Saddledome Wednesday with his first cheeky affront to Canadian hockey fans.

It came in the form of a USA Hockey t-shirt he sported as a playful jab at Canadian teammates reeling from world junior disappointment at the hands of Tkachuk's fellow Americans.

Call it an early jump on being Canada's most reviled player.

"You don't want to brag too much," smiled Canada's Prince of Perturbing. "I came in here today pretty even-keeled and had a little smirk going and waited for someone to say something to me before I went right back at them."

Yes, a good chunk of Calgary Flames got their first taste of the famous smirk that irks — a grating grin the 6-foot-2, 202-pound winger has offered up to players league-wide the last four years.

"I had a lot of different people I bet with — we won't get into any of those," said the game's biggest star agitator outside of Brad Marchand.

"All I can say is I'm pumped I won. Definitely proud of the guys for the whupping they put on the boys from Canada. That was fun to watch. Because I played, and was at that stage, I definitely take a lot of pride in watching them."

As a former member of the U.S. National Team Development Program, as well as the bronze medal-winning American team at the 2016 world juniors, Tkachuk bleeds red, white and blue. His taunting t-shirt was a tribute to the late Jim Johansson, a beloved USA Hockey executive who was so instrumental in the country's ongoing hockey development.

With a list of former national team colleagues that includes Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel, Charlie McAvoy, Dylan Larkin and Noah Hanifin, it comes as no surprise the 23-year-old son of a former U.S. Olympian cherishes the possibility of representing the U.S. at the world's next top tourney.

"I do think about that a lot," said the Phoenix native, who calls St. Louis home in the off-season.

"Whether it's next Olympics or World Cup, it would be unbelievable to represent your country in a best-on-best like that. I'd say other than winning a Stanley Cup, winning an Olympic gold is probably next on my bucket list for my playing career. I'd love to get a chance to do that."

As Tkachuk is poised to prove to Canadians from coast to coast, he's certainly talented enough to be included on the next American Olympic team.

Taking centre stage in the hockey world last year by single-handedly resurrecting the Battle of Alberta, the Flames' future captain also quietly

went about leading Calgary in scoring despite being parked on the team's top shutdown line.

This year the former 34-goal scorer has opened Flames camp alongside Elias Lindholm on what may be the basis of the team's new top trio moving forward.

And while the North Division and all its back-to-back battles will certainly give Tkachuk plenty of opportunities to remind fans how agitating he can be, he'll also be sure to inflict pain on opponents by way of his offensive skill.

Case in point, his buzzer-beating, between-the-legs snipe in Nashville last year was amongst the very best goals the NHL has seen in ages.

"I don't just want to be known as a certain type of player, I want to be a player who makes a difference every single night," said Tkachuk, who wears an A on his jersey with pride.

"I look at (the Flames season) like I look at myself. I have to take not only a step, but two, five or 10 steps forward this year to be the player I want to be."

The parity and natural rivalries he's helped build in the seven-team Canadian division should be the perfect fit for him.

"I don't think it will affect my style at all — actually kind of the opposite, it suits my style more this year," said Tkachuk, when asked if he'd have to change his game to meet the demands of what promises to be an intense division.

"I think one of my gifts is it doesn't take me very much to get up for games. Coming into an all-Canadian division it's going to be a rivalry every night, and a lot of eyes on us in this country. It's going to be exciting."

And gritty.

Exactly how Tkachuk likes it.

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1181690 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Tyson Barrie hoping to re-write his narrative with Oilers

Mark Spector@sportsnetspec

January 6, 2021, 5:39 PM

EDMONTON — Tyson Barrie has checked enough of the boxes.

His first trade, check, to Toronto in a deal that sent Nazem Kadri to Colorado. His first stint playing under the hot lights of a Canadian market — check. And now his first free-agent deal, a one-year "prove yourself" deal with an Edmonton Oilers team that will end one of two ways:

Either he'll settle in on a longer-term deal in Edmonton, or seven months from now Barrie will be joining his fourth team in two years, answering all the same questions over again.

"You're right on some of that stuff," Barrie allows, smiling at the other end of the phone. "At this point in my career, I haven't come close to winning (a Stanley Cup) yet. I think they're poised to win here, and I'd like to be a part of that."

"If there is an opportunity for me to stay here long-term in Edmonton, it could be a great fit."



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At age 29 and with more than 550 games under his belt, theoretically this is where preparation meets opportunity.

Theoretically...

"I sure hope so," Barrie said after Wednesday's workout. "That was the thought process in taking the deal here, and I'm super excited to see it come to fruition. I'll try to make the most of it."

So, who is Tyson Barrie, the new right-shot, power-play quarterback in Edmonton?

Well he is the son of Len Barrie, drafted in the sixth round by these same Oilers back in 1988, and grandson to Len Barrie Sr., whose hockey school in B.C.'s interior the grandson has volunteered at for many summers.

His arrival in Edmonton comes on the heels of a season in Toronto that has, strangely, forced this veteran player into a position where he has been forced to re-prove himself. To stake a claim once again, well past the midway point in his NHL career, to what kind of player he really is.

"The year in Toronto may have changed things a bit, and then you throw a pandemic into the mix..." Barrie begins. "It was just kind of a bizarre circumstance. I'd like to get back to the player I was when I left Colorado. It's tougher than you think, moving teams, having a new coach and all that.

"I think I have the hang of it now. I've wrapped my head around it. It's not like I'm looking to prove people wrong, but just kind of re-establish myself."

Barrie found himself on the wrong side of then-Leafs coach Mike Babcock, due perhaps in part to the fact he was an acquisition made by general manager Kyle Dubas. A pawn in the deteriorating relationship between coach and GM, when Barrie's opening to the 2019-20 season was even worse than the Leafs' tepid start, life behind the blue Maple Leaf began to heat up.

He was harder on himself than anyone else, issuing some very honest assessments on the state of his game.

"I'd never been off to a start like that: no goals, seven assists in 25 games. Our team was floating around .500, and it just felt like a lot of pressure. You know, more pressure than I'd dealt with in Colorado," he said. "I was just trying to be honest with myself, and let people know that I expected more from myself.

"It was a good experience," he stressed of Toronto. "It was just tough because I was trying to play catch-up with the fans, and my game. Then we quarantined, went back into the bubble... It was a bizarre year.

"Toronto is a tough city to play in if you're not performing to the standard you're used to, or the fans think you should be. But I'll tell ya, it would be an unbelievable place to win."

Today, Barrie finds himself in another Canadian market teeming with impatience over a hockey team whose lineup is star-laden, yet the playoff mantle remains bare. Edmonton and Toronto are not much different, and you wonder: Is Barrie still the same guy?

"Signing here was a no-brainer," Barrie said. "I hope I can come in, be a part of the offence and get the puck moving, work the powerplay, join the rush... And hopefully bring a little bit of leadership. You know, I've been through a bit in my career. Gone through some playoff rounds and such. I think it will be a good fit."

It can't all be about the other team's net, however, and this is where Barrie will carve a direction for the rest of his career. An "offenceman" is not what the Oilers need.

What they require is a D-man to work the top of the power play, a guy who can snap an accurate outlet pass, but also a player who helps the stated team goal of being better at five-on-five play. At both ends of the ice.

They did not speak well of Barrie's defensive game in Toronto, though whether that was a team issue or a player issue is up for some debate. He knows that the narrative sticks, and he'll have to create a new one with his play this season.

"The way that my style of game is, and the size that I am, I'm always going to fight that stereotype," Barrie said. "But I've line-matched against top lines for large periods of a season, in playoffs... I know I can do it. I've got to stay focused on it and commit to that part of the game."

It's that, or keep on moving on.

His Dad was property of six NHL organizations. Edmonton is Tyson's third.

He'd like to make it his last.

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets' Maurice tasked with balancing Hellebuyck's rhythm, Brossoit's growth

Ken Wiebe@WiebesWorld

January 6, 2021, 6:17 PM

WINNIPEG — Connor Hellebuyck figures he could handle somewhere in the neighbourhood of 40 to 45 starts in a condensed season.

Winnipeg Jets backup Laurent Brossoit didn't want to limit his own projections, but fully understands there are playing-time challenges when it comes to being behind the Vezina Trophy winner on the depth chart.

Jets head coach Paul Maurice will be tasked with finding the sweet spot when it comes to ensuring his workhorse starter stays in a rhythm, but he also provides enough opportunities for the No. 2 guy to stay sharp enough to give his team a chance to win when his number is called.

With 56 games in 114 days, not only managing the workload but optimizing it could mean the difference between finishing in the top four in the Great White North Division or being on the outside looking in come playoff time.

"I'm surprised he dropped it to 45, to be honest with you," said Maurice. "He's a gamer, man. He's competitive. I think it's going to be easier to balance in this situation than any other. The point is, in a condensed schedule, your No. 1 goalie can take the day off and totally feel like he's still in the rhythm the next time he gets back into the net. So I don't think that's going to be a challenge for us."

Only Carey Price of the Montreal Canadiens started more games than Hellebuyck (58 to 56) last season and it's clear he'd like to remain near the top of the minutes-played category moving forward.

"That's tough because there's a lot that goes into that, just based on play and fatigue levels and stuff like that. We've briefly talked about it and I'm a guy that likes to play a lot, but who knows what's going to happen," said Hellebuyck. "So it depends on how the season plays out, but I would like to be somewhere in the 40-45 range."

Hellebuyck has been a Vezina Trophy finalist in two of the past three seasons, so he expects to continue playing at a high level.

"I think you could ask that to anyone on this team and they're all probably going to answer the same way. They're all going to say yes, I need to be



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the very best of myself in order for this team to win a Stanley Cup. So at the end of the day, that is how it works," said Hellebuyck.

"Now the only one that matters in the Stanley Cup. I'd love to win another Vezina, that would be great, but it's time. I'm in my prime, this team's in its prime, it's time to win a Stanley Cup and every day has to be building toward that. It doesn't have to happen today but tomorrow's got to be a better version of yourself than you were today."

Hellebuyck isn't concerned about the limited game action he's participated in since March and has a clear focus on what he's trying to get accomplished in the final week before the regular season gets going.

"That's my biggest key for this training camp, to get my patience back to where it is near the end of the season. That is very crucial for me to be the best that I can be," said Hellebuyck. "Not only that, I want to keep improving every day. I want to keep failing out there because you don't learn from your success. You learn from your failure. So the more these guys score on me, the better I'm going to become."

Brossoit signed a third consecutive one-year deal with the Jets during the off-season.

There's a comfort level for both goalies and while Brossoit recognizes his place in the pecking order, his long-term goal remains the same.

At some point, he wants to be a No. 1 guy.

"There comes a lot of challenges when you're playing behind a Vezina winner," said Brossoit. "But everything is (about) how you take a situation. There's a lot of positives in a situation like this. I can learn a lot from watching a Vezina winner day to day and seeing what it takes and seeing that I'm not that far off and that it's quite possible and that I get to compete on the ice with him in practice. I like that challenge, and if there's someone you want to end up being better than it's probably the guy that's considered to be the best right now."

"You can't predict the future. And the only thing I can really control is my preparation per day and per week and per season. And as the opportunities come, that's the name of the game in sports is sometimes you've got to wait for your opportunities and when those arise take advantage. Whether I did take advantage of those opportunities previously in my career or not, whenever they come I'd like to think I'm getting better and better and each opportunity that arises I'm going to be more and more prepared. And then once I get enough of them, I'd like to think that my time is yet to come."

Veteran forward Trevor Lewis, who is in camp on a pro tryout offer, jumped out of his mandatory quarantine and right into the first scrimmage — and he didn't need much time to make an impression.

Lewis scored the opening goal and set up the winner from Jansen Harkins as Team Blue defeated Team White 3-2.

Nelson Nogier, a defenceman who was playing forward, rounded out the scoring for Team Blue, while Kyle Connor and CJ Suess scored for Team White.

While it's important not to overreact to one scrimmage, Lewis looked right at home on a unit with fellow veteran Nate Thompson and Harkins.

Should Lewis show enough to secure a contract, a spot on the fourth line — plus some time on the penalty kill — would be where he would fit in.

"It's been quite a long process for me. I had some interest from some teams, and this kind of came together right after Christmas and it was a pretty quick turnaround. It felt like a good opportunity. I've got to earn a spot but I've been working hard this off-season and had a lot of time off so my body is healed up and I feel great."

Lewis knows what is expected of him and recognizes his strengths at this stage of his career.

"Skating has always been one of my strengths and I think that's a big part of the game nowadays. Obviously just PK ability and forecheck I've always prided myself on and kind of being a utility guy where I can play

any position and kind of move up and down the line-up. Whatever they need me to do I will do. What keeps me going? I love the game and I love to compete and I'm excited to be here."

Chosen 17th overall in 2006 by the Los Angeles Kings, Lewis admits his game has evolved over the years.

"When I got drafted, coming up I thought maybe I'd be a skill guy coming in," said Lewis. "But I realized very quickly that it's going to have to be a 200-foot game for me to make it. I had a lot of great coaches along the way and Darryl Sutter kind of gave me a role early on in my career and I kind of ran with it. It's just been one of those things ever since then."

Although he hasn't appeared in a real game since March, Lewis used the down time wisely and believes he's fresh coming into the new season.

"Absolutely. You know, it's definitely probably the longest I've been off," said Lewis, who was part of two Stanley Cup-winning teams with the Kings. "I stayed out in L.A. and lucky they were great to me there and let me skate and train there at the facility. I've been skating and working out for a long time and I definitely think it was a benefit for me to have that much time off and let the body fully recover. You know, everything feels great and I'm just excited to be here."

Medals for prospects

Top defence prospect Ville Heinola is expected to be back in Winnipeg on Thursday after helping Finland capture a bronze medal at the 2021 World Junior Hockey Championship in Edmonton, but he must complete a seven-day quarantine before joining Jets training camp.

Heinola finished with four assists in seven games for Finland and was named to the media all-star team as he averaged just under 24 minutes per game.

"Ville looks a little quicker and he's still got the same ice running through his veins when he's sliding across that blue-line," Maurice said earlier this week. "I understand why we draft people. Every one one of these guys that's at that world tournament, you can see something specifically in their game. You can understand why we drafted and what we're hoping develops in them."

Finnish centre Henrik Nikkanen, chosen in the fourth round of the 2019 NHL Draft by the Jets, also showed well during the event, finishing with two goals and an assist in seven games while averaging 14:24 of ice time.

Nikkanen skates well for a big man (six-foot-four) and will now head back to his club team in Finland.

Top forward prospect Cole Perfetti settled for a silver medal with Team Canada after a heartbreaking loss to the United States on Tuesday.

Since he's been with Team Canada in Alberta since the middle of November, the Jets decided to give Perfetti a few days back home in Ontario before he makes his way to Winnipeg.

Perfetti finished the tournament with two goals and six points in seven games.

Since he's going to miss all of camp, Perfetti is a good bet to start the season on the taxi squad.

Since the start of the OHL campaign has been postponed indefinitely, Perfetti would be eligible to play games in the American Hockey League before the Saginaw Spirit season gets going.

INJURY UPDATES

Defenceman Tucker Poolman and forwards Mathieu Perreault and David Gustafsson were held out of Wednesday's scrimmage due to minor injuries, though each of them seems to be making progress.

Poolman shed the non-contact jersey and might be ready to join the main group on Thursday.

Forward Marko Dano has cleared waivers but remains unfit to practice.



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Ward focuses on standards, good habits early in Flames camp

By Salim Valji

It took just two days for Calgary Flames head coach Geoff Ward to use profanity to drive home a point during practice.

On Tuesday, the coach was irked by an offensive zone drill and launched into a brief soliloquy, demanding more focus.

"There's a minimum standard of work that we want to adhere to," Ward said on Wednesday.

"There's a minimum standard of execution and we hold each other mutually accountable for both those standards. I just felt like so early in camp, things went a little bit awry with our execution and I just wanted to make sure we brought things back on track. It's not something we do an awful lot, but once in a while we do use it to grab attention."

In a 56-game NHL season where a slow start could prove fatal - and a team that could be embarking on its own version of The Last Dance - Ward is trying to instill good habits in the hope that they'll pay off in the spring.

"The only way that I know to create good habits is to make sure that you keep doing things again and again and again and again the way that you want it done," he said.

"For us, we're going to keep harping on that from Day 1 right to the end of the season. And that's a standard that we've committed to and it's a standard that we'll abide by for the rest of the year."

Veteran forward Derek Ryan brushed the sequence off, calling it a teaching moment that was to be expected during any training camp.

"I think that's kind of expected, honestly, at this stage in the game," Ryan said on Wednesday. "I think it happened when we were working on our tracking or forechecking, whatever it was, and somebody had a misread or a missed assignment. Basically they're just using that as a teaching opportunity, a teaching moment, whether it's for the young guys or even the veteran guys to reinforce the ideas they're trying to practice."

That it took Ward two days to use profanity may have been an accomplishment in and of itself.

"I think I've seen it even earlier, within the first 10 minutes of Day 1, I've seen the coaches lose it pretty quickly," Ryan said. "Making it to Day 2 is a success."

Flames fans will get a look at those standards and habits on Thursday evening, when Team Iginla and Team McDonald face each other in their first intrasquad game.

"With a new season of The Bachelor television program finally here, many of us diehards are wondering the same thing: Will they or won't they end up together? No doubt that after a disappointing playoffs, Flames fans are asking themselves that very question - whether star forwards Sean Monahan and Johnny Gaudreau will play together on a line this season. TSN's Travis Yost has written extensively on this very topic.

"Ultimately, I think Ward has to roll with Gaudreau and Monahan to start the upcoming season, if only to test whether last year's performance

together was more statistical aberration than growing trend," Yost predicted.

Early on in training camp, the answer appears to be 'yes.' Through the first three days, the two have been skating with newcomers Josh Leivo and Dominik Simon.

Similar to the TV show, it's a question that'll likely be asked many times in the coming months and we'll all wait with bated breath until the spring to get the penultimate answer.

*The biggest surprise to many people may just be how big new Calgary goalie Jacob Markstrom is. According to NHL.com, last season he was the sixth-tallest netminder to take the ice at 6-foot-6.

In fact, the minute Markstrom takes the ice on Jan. 14 in Winnipeg, he'll be tied with Henrik Karlsson and Jon Gillies as the tallest goalies to ever see action for the Flames. He is also tied with Anders Nilsson as the tallest goalies in Vancouver Canucks history.

*Fresh off signing a one-year qualifying offer, defenceman Oliver Kylington is in Calgary but working through immigration issues. He's not expected to return to the team before training camp ends. It's a tough break for the 23-year-old who, according to Natural Stat Trick, played most often with Rasmus Andersson while primarily starting shifts in the offensive zone last season. He's battling with Nikita Nesterov for a depth role on the Flames' blueline.

*One thing we do know about Nesterov is that he's honest. The Russian had a wager with Sean Monahan on the Canada-Russia semifinal game at the World Juniors in Edmonton. The day after Canada's decisive 5-0 victory, the money was waiting for Monahan in his stall.

*Speaking of World Juniors, Matthew Tkachuk had a few wagers with teammates involving money. One such bet didn't involve monetary currency, but rather pride...and...Twitter. The Flames' alternate captain wouldn't divulge any more details.

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Dermott not afraid to fight for top-six spot

By Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto Maple Leafs Reporter

TSN Toronto Reporter Kristen Shilton reports on the Maple Leafs, who held a scrimmage and short practice on their third day of training camp Wednesday at Ford Performance Centre

If Travis Dermott was surprised to find himself outside the top six to start Maple Leafs' training camp, he isn't saying. What the blueliner will cop to is knowing that, with the right level of consistency, he can make his way back there.

"I think [it's] just settling into my game," Dermott told reporters on a Zoom call Wednesday. "I know what my game looks like when I'm playing my best and I think just sticking to those [things]. Not pushing too far out of what I know are my strengths, understanding what game situations are like and knowing when to pick my spots. I think that's my next step, and it's felt pretty good in camp so far."

To date, Dermott has been part of the Leafs' fourth defensive pairing with Rasmus Sandin, while newcomers Mikko Lehtonen and Zach Bogosian have overtaken him into the third pairing slots. Adding those pieces in the



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off-season was meant to give Toronto's blueline a much-needed boost and, because of it, players like Dermott will have to work that much harder to see the ice.

"We've talked to Travis about the fact that we feel like our defence, and our depth on defence, has improved," said head coach Sheldon Keefe. "And if you're someone that was sitting previously in the 5, 6, 7, 8 spots, that's going to have an effect."

Dermott ranked sixth overall in ice time amongst Toronto's defencemen last season, averaging 17:19 per night while producing four goals and 11 points in 56 appearances. Keefe stressed that the Leafs do know what Dermott is capable of, and with only three camp sessions under their belt, nothing is set in stone for Toronto. There's still plenty of time for Dermott to make a move, if he's ready to do so.

"No final determinations have been made on how it'll sort out," Keefe said. "We know with Derms, he can play either side and he can move up and down the lineup in terms of responsibilities. We're just looking for an increased level of consistency and kind of a reset for him, but his skill set remains very strong and one that we believe in."

Dermott has taken these challenges to heart, and should use them as motivation going forward. Beyond just looking for playing time this season, Dermott also has another contract negotiation on the horizon after signing a one-year, \$874,125 extension with the Leafs as a restricted free agent in the fall.

"I don't expect there to be a point where I don't have to prove myself in my career," he said. "I think you always want to prove yourself. Especially in this camp, you're jumping into it and it's high intensity right away and that takes a lot of the focus of your brain. It's such a high tempo and you're focused on that more than any personal stuff. It's just jumping into scrimmages and you're facing guys that are just as excited as you are to get the season going fast so it's a lot of just team focus more than on one person right now."

And there's always a chance Dermott remains outside the top six to start but still finds his way into game action early when Keefe deploys the seven defencemen set he's been mulling.

"I don't think we will start that way [in an 11-7 look], but I think it's an option that we can go to with the increased depth that we have on defence so that may benefit us at different times," Keefe said. "I think the traditional 12 and six to start with is what we'll focus on, but we used 11 and seven at times last season as well and I've done that throughout my coaching career so we've got different options there that we'll utilize when we deem it right."

There's one thing Keefe would like to see a little more of from Mitch Marner, something that might fall under the category of killer instinct.

"It's something I've talked to him about and communicated that I'd like to see from him, to take it upon himself to challenge the net, challenge the defence," Keefe said. "He's got so much speed and creativity, you'd like to see him attack the net more frequently to generate chances for himself or rebound opportunities for others or to draw more penalties."

Keefe saw some of that from Marner in Wednesday's scrimmage, where the winger scored once in Team Blue's 6-0 drubbing of Team White. Last season, Marner ranked second on the Leafs in points (67), but was just fifth overall in goals (16), an area Keefe could definitely see him improving.

"He scored a great goal today, just taking it upon himself to take it to the net and finish," Keefe said. "And there were a couple other instances where he did the same thing. I think that just the consistency that he can bring to both sides of the game, offensively and defensively, [is huge]. He'll become more of a shooting threat and adding that element to his game, I think it's important no matter who he's playing with. I think there's times where he can look to attack himself and that was nice to see."

Since camp started on Monday, Marner has been on a line with Auston Matthews and Joe Thornton, a trio that defenceman Justin Holl has already deemed "formidable."

Keefe's been happy, too, not just with how that line is shaking out but the way Marner is continually rising to the occasion.

"Obviously, expectations are quite high with him," Keefe said. "But he looked really good today and again that line was very good. It looks like he's got good legs and good energy and is confident and certainly looks ready to play for real."

The Leafs went through two days of hard practices to start the week, and Keefe hoped they'd translate the good habits developed there into Wednesday's inter-squad scrimmage. But that didn't quite work out as planned.

"I would say that it didn't really reach the same level that we've seen in our practice drills and things like that," Keefe admitted. "We had a drop-off in some of our details and physicality so we want to clean that up going forward and we'll talk about that."

The positive for Keefe was that his players got to experience a game-like atmosphere again and were really competing, albeit just against one another. And Team Blue still delivered a 6-0 thrashing of Team White despite the inconsistencies evident to Keefe, with Matthews, Marner, Wayne Simmonds, Jason Spezza, Joey Anderson and Morgan Rielly all lighting the lamp.

"We know we have a short amount of time before we start playing for real," Keefe said. "So we've got to do better than we did today in that regard. We also practiced our shootouts today. We had one at the end of each of our halves that we had in the scrimmage itself. So that was nice to see that and to get both the goalies and our prime shooters that we intend to use in the shoot out the reps there."

Keefe tapped Matthews, Marner, John Tavares, William Nylander, Jimmy Vesey and Spezza for the shootout portions.

One of the off-season activities that kept Ilya Mikheyev busy this year was shooting a commercial spot for Campbell's Soup, a somewhat daunting experience for the first-time brand ambassador that made one thing very clear:

"Hockey is much easier."

Thankfully, Mikheyev is back at his day job and fully healthy to boot. He missed all but 39 games of his rookie season last year after suffering lacerations to his wrist caused by New Jersey Devils' forward Jesper Bratt's errant skate blade in a game on Dec. 27.

Rehabbed and ready to go when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, Mikheyev didn't return to the ice until Toronto's five-game stint in a qualifying round series against Columbus during last summer's postseason tournament. In the Leafs' losing effort, Mikheyev failed to register a single point, and that disappointment alone taught him a lot.

"I'd never played in the NHL so now I feel like I know and understand how we can be better and how I can do better and how I can help in the future," he said. "In the playoffs, it's much better than the regular season and everything is better, everything is more difficult [with the] physicality especially."

Mikheyev can pass along those lessons now to another Leafs' rookie, and his former Russian national team teammate, Alexander Barabanov.

Using Leafs' development coach Nik Antropov as a translator, Barabanov said Mikheyev has been very helpful since he signed a one-year, entry-level contract with Toronto last April, but he's working to become more independent as well.

"It's really important at the beginning to have Ilya there in the dressing room and if I need something or I'm struggling with something, he can ask for both of us," Barabanov said through Antropov. "At the same time,



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"I'm really learning English hard. I want to communicate in the dressing room with the other guys as well."

Keefe has Barabanov currently situated on the fourth line with Spezza and Simmonds, a pair of veterans who have also taken Barabanov under their wing.

"Spezza and Simmonds are talking to him lots to make sure that they've explained the drills a second or third time in practice and making sure that he knows what's going on," Keefe said. "And Mikheyev, at the same time, has been really good about helping Barabanov as well."

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1181694 Websites

USA TODAY / Team USA explains controversial Canada barrel after winning world juniors gold: 'No disrespect to anyone'

Jimmy Hascup

USA TODAY

A United States-Canada matchup in hockey always comes with some extra passion. Make it a gold-medal game, and, well, bragging rights are on the line.

Team USA's 2-0 victory against Canada on Tuesday for the world hockey championship drew some added emotion and controversy when the winners were shown taking a photo on Rogers Place ice during their celebration next to a barrel with the Hockey Canada logo on it.

According to members of the team, the USA used a barrel throughout the tournament as their motivation tool and they meant no disrespect to the silver medalists to the north.

"We pretty much had a barrel for each team we were playing," USA forward Trevor Zegras (Ducks) said in his post-game interview. "Each game we just wanted to get to the next barrel. Today was our last barrel. We threw the Canada sign up there, (put) it on the ice and took our picture. It was kind of our thing this tournament."

When asked about the significance, Zegras said that it was about "getting to the next barrel — not looking too far ahead, only looking to that game, the next opponent."

After losing to Russia in its first game, the United States won six in a row to capture its fifth under-20 title and first since 2017, giving Canada, the 2020 winners who had not trailed in 2021, its first loss in the tournament.

Head coach Nate Leaman expanded on the meaning of the barrel in his post-game press conference.

"It's a story that when I was an assistant coach (with the USA at world juniors) in 2007, that (head coach) Ron Rolston brought to our team," Leaman said. "About crossing the heart of the Sahara Desert, crossing a terrain that's 500 miles long, that over 1,300 people had perished and the only way that they could figure to cross this part of the Sahara Desert was to put barrels out so that when you got to one barrel, the only thing you could see was the next barrel on the horizon."

"I shared the story with the guys before the tournament, and let them know that we're not going to talk about the gold medal. All we're talking about is going one barrel at a time."

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the tournament was played without fans in Edmonton, Alberta.

Goalie Spencer Knight (Panthers) made 34 saves for his third shutout of the tournament, while Zegras led the way with a goal and an assist, giving him seven goals and 11 assists for the tournament, the top-scoring mark.

"It's just a great image," Leaman said. "It was a great way to get through this tough tournament — to just go one barrel at a time, stay in the process, and not get ahead of ourselves. Just focus on the next barrel."

Leaman explained that there was a barrel in the locker room that included the logo of next team the USA was playing. It was a way of staying focused on the present.

"We took a selfie in the locker room around the barrel after every win," said Leaman who also reiterated it again on Twitter. "Every one of our wins, we have our team around the barrel in the locker room. ... (Tonight) they got into the emotion of the celebration, they wanted to get the barrel on the ice. No disrespect to anyone, especially Canada, who played a great game today and obviously had a great team. It's not disrespectful to them. I'm sure every team had something in the tournament that they rallied around, and ours was the barrel."

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