



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

From broadcasters to how to watch, here's what you should know about Hurricanes games

By Chip Alexander

Fox Sports Carolinas will televise 54 of the Carolina Hurricanes' 56 games in the 2020-21 regular season, it was announced Thursday.

The games will be broadcast in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia through cable, satellite and over-the-top providers, including AT&T U-verse, AT&T TV, DirecTV and Spectrum.

Mike Maniscalco will serve as the play-by-play announcer after spending four seasons as in-game reporter and host of

Hurricanes LIVE. Maniscalco was the play-by-play announcer in the Canes' 2020 Return to Play postseason.

Tripp Tracy returns for his 22nd season as game analyst and former Hurricanes player Shane Willis will return for his eighth season as Hurricanes LIVE analyst

Abby Labar has been promoted to the host of Hurricanes LIVE and will also serve as in-game reporter. Before joining the FOX Sports Carolina's telecast, Labar spent four seasons as the Hurricanes' in-arena host and reporter.

Hurricanes, Predators to share AHL affiliation with Chicago Wolves this season

By Chip Alexander

The coronavirus pandemic has brought about some strange bedfellows in sports, and here's another one:

The Carolina Hurricanes and Nashville Predators, both members of the NHL's new Discover Central Division, will jointly have an American Hockey League affiliation with the Chicago Wolves.

Don Waddell, the Canes president and general manager, announced the agreement Thursday. The Predators will be able to loan players to the Wolves in the 2020-21 AHL season.

"This season presents a unique situation, with NHL teams having taxi squads and some AHL teams opting out," Waddell said in a statement. "We were able to come to an agreement with the Predators and Wolves that we believe benefits everyone involved. The Wolves have been great partners and we're thankful for their willingness to work out this agreement."

Making the arrangement more intriguing is that the Canes and Predators will play each other eight times this season. It's likely a Canes player will be recalled from the Wolves, play against a Wolves teammate in an NHL game with the Preds, and then both return to be AHL teammates again in Chicago.

NHL teams will be allowed taxi squads this season with four to six players, but it's possible a teammate-to-foe situation will arise.

The Canes ended their long AHL affiliation with the Charlotte Checkers and signed a three-year deal with Chicago in September 2020. The Checkers have opted out of the 2020-21 season because of COVID-19 concerns as have the Milwaukee Admirals, the Predators' AHL affiliate.

The current Wolves coaching staff, including head coach Ryan Warsofsky, will handle coaching duties, the Canes said.

THE ATHLETIC

'You get tough when you get beat down': Q&A with Canes prospect Jack LaFontaine

By Sara Civian

The Hurricanes picked goaltender Jack LaFontaine in the third round of the 2016 draft, and yes, he was big and athletic, but it was starting to seem like a reach.

His two seasons at Michigan, a team that was actively seeking a goalie at the time, might've made LaFontaine just call it a career. He posted a goals-against average of 3.33 in just eleven appearances with the Wolverines in 2016-17, then a 3.51 in 11 games in 2017-18.

But seeking a fresh start, LaFontaine left Michigan and signed with the BCHL's Penticton Vees, and things started to improve. On paper, he ended with a .923 save percentage and

2.19 GAA in 45 starts, earning the BCHL's goaltender of the year honor.

Now, he's finds himself with a 9-0-0 record and a 1.00 GAA, serving as the starting goalie on the best college hockey team in the nation. But he touts himself as a hard worker who happens to be good at hockey. And if you talk to him for 45 seconds, you're reminded that change isn't bad just because it's scary. And sometimes years of hard work presents itself as luck.

Obviously you've had an interesting path. Can you walk me through it from your own perspective?

Oh gosh, you got the whole day? Obviously it's been quite the journey, starting off in Michigan as a true freshman, learning



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a lot there as a hockey player and as a person. Then landing myself in Penticton back to juniors and it was a blast there — I had a lot of fun. And then I just got very lucky with the opportunity that arose in Minnesota with Mat Robson signing an NHL deal. It was a long journey and obviously it's a little bit anti-climatic to wrap it up in two or three sentences, but I've met a lot of cool people every step of the way and I had a lot of people supporting me. It was well worth it to get to the point I am at today, and I'd like to think it's only beginning at this stage in my life.

Did you ever have any doubts in the moment, making the moves that you did?

Oh yeah, 100 percent. And it's one thing to have doubts when you're in the net, but it's another thing when you're making massive career and life changes. Leaving Michigan, for me, wasn't just a hockey decision — it was a life decision. I was going to be dropping out of school, leaving some of my best friends, I had a girlfriend at the time. It was a lifestyle change. I don't think there was as much doubt as there was just hesitation of change. My life was going to change, I was going to lose some things that I love and thought I couldn't live with out. Its scary, and I was scared at that time. But I was very fortunate to have a lot of people in my corner thrust me into certain positions that were uncomfortable at the time, but it all made me stronger as a human being. I guess the interesting thing about being mentally tough is that you can't be mentally tough when things are going well, you get tough when you get beat down a little. That's what happened to me, I guess. I learned to be tougher and rise above it.

Do you think all the places you've been give you a unique perspective?

Oh, no, yeah. (Author's note: In Canadian and Minnesotan, this phrase means an enthusiastic yes.) Absolutely. I think that's something I actually bring to this team — there's a lot of Minnesota guys, a lot of freshmen, a lot of superstars. I think I kinda bring that other perspective of playing out anyone's worst nightmare — and I lived through it to see the light of day. I feel like I can be a soundboard for anyone else on this team who is going through something. But to be quite honest with you, I think I've learned more from my teammates than they've

ever learned from me. The great thing about hockey is it doesn't matter how old you are or what position you play, you're always learning in this sport.

OK, what's going on with Minnesota right now?

I just think we have a great dressing room dynamic, our coaching staff is unbelievable. It's just such a joy to come to the rink every day, it just puts a smile on my face. We talked about it today, we don't play like a 10-0-0 team. What we mean by that is we take it one game at a time, we're on a path to get better each game, we're a very determined and motivated team and I think that starts with the culture coach (Bob) Motzko is breeding here. I can't stress enough just how great of a team this is, as far as human beings in the locker room. Great people, the coaching staff is filled with such phenomenal people and it goes down the line, I could give you other people (Author's note: He listed many people). ... Everyone around this hockey team are just good people, and I'm a big believer that if you surround yourself with good people, good things happen. I think we got a lot of good people and it just so happens we're not that bad of a hockey team.

How would you describe your style of play to someone who has never seen you play before?

I'd say I put in the work, some saves are going to be pretty, some are going to be ugly. But I'm going to whatever it takes to keep that puck out of the net. I use this line too much, but I've never been the biggest goalie, I've never been the most talented goalie, but I've always been the hardest working and I've always been the most competitive. That's been a staple in my game since the age of 8. So, that's just my genetic makeup and my upbringing.

What's one thing you wish you could tell your younger self?

Never give up. I mean, there are a lot of dark days. There are a lot of tough games. Tough conversations. I would just tell my younger self to never give up, and to keep that goal of playing Division I hockey in the back of your mind. Here I am as a 23-year-old, and it's the most rewarding thing in the whole damn world. I'm probably the luckiest 23-year-old on the planet right now.

Ranking NHL's best under-23 stars: Dahlin, Pettersson or Lafreniere at No. 1?

By Corey Pronman

In the three months since my last NHL prospect list, most major leagues have played games and we had a World Junior Championship tournament.

While we await the start of the NHL, AHL, WHL and OHL season, the presentation of this list has undergone some changes.

The 20-80 scouting scale, one I've long used from baseball, has been retired. It has been replaced by descriptive terms of where I think the attribute will fit in the NHL. Why did I do this? For one, I observed that I wasn't using a large part of the 20-80 scale, resulting in most grades being between 50-60. Second, I want to use a scale that precisely and clearly shows what I mean.

The new scale has seven levels: Poor, below-average, average, above-average, high-end, elite and special. When I say a player projects as an average skater, that means NHL average, which is praiseworthy. When I say a player has elite hands, that means he projects to be among the very best in the NHL. High-end IQ refers to the top third of the league.

I also removed individual writeups for each player. This may not be permanent, but given we just did individual writeups for almost all the ranked players a few months ago, I thought this would be beneficial to make the ranking more digestible to read. Players will be tiered and graded as usual, but the tiers will have collective writeups.

Finally, I removed the physical game grade and replaced it with compete level. The physical game grade was a blurred combination of size, strength and compete that I found too misleading.



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Shots are still only graded if they are notably good or poor.

Tool grades are not perfectly correlated to ranking. Variables such as a player's production, size, age and league are incorporated into the evaluation.

Players are eligible if they were under 23 years of age as of Jan. 1, 2021. This resulted in players such as Auston Matthews and Charlie McAvoy aging out.

I want your feedback on these changes, whether you prefer the new or old format.

Tier 1: Elite NHL player

1. Rasmus Dahlin, D, Buffalo

April 13, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 205 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 2

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

2. Elias Pettersson, C, Vancouver

Nov. 12, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 176 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 3

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

3. Alexis Lafrenière, LW, New York Rangers

Oct. 11, 2001 | 6-foot-1 | 193 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 4

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

This category includes two No. 1 picks and one player in Pettersson who would be the first pick if the 2017 NHL Draft was redone. I realize with Dahlin I'm sticking my neck out a tad given that he hasn't been a true top NHL player in his two seasons. I still think a defenseman with his size, skill and creativity, and with how he looked as a teenager in the league, he is going to become an elite player. Lafrenière hasn't played a game yet but he checks almost every box you look for in a top NHL player. We will see how it translates to the NHL, particularly his pace, but he has the looks of a cornerstone piece.

Tier 2: Elite/all-star bubble

4. Matthew Tkachuk, LW, Calgary

Dec. 11, 1997 | 6-foot-2 | 203 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 5

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

5. Andrei Svechnikov, RW, Carolina

March 26, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 6

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

6. Patrik Laine, RW, Winnipeg

April 19, 1998 | 6-foot-4 | 205 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 7

Skating: Poor
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Elite

7. Jack Hughes, C, New Jersey

May 14, 2001 | 5-foot-10 | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 8

Skating: Elite
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

8. Kaapo Kakko, RW, New York Rangers

Feb. 13, 2001 | 6-foot-3 | 198 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 9

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

I may get push back on Hughes and Kakko still being rated this highly after tough rookie NHL seasons, particularly for Kakko. You have to balance what you saw in the NHL last season at 18, against the toolkits and what I've seen from the players historically, which are elite track records. I see an argument to slightly lower Hughes' and Kakko's stock, but not significantly until we see how the 2021 season goes.

Tier 3: NHL all-star

9. Quinn Hughes, D, Vancouver

Oct. 14, 1999 | 5-foot-10 | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 11



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Skating: Elite
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

10. Brady Tkachuk, LW, Ottawa

Sept. 16, 1999 | 6-foot-3 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 12

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: High-end

11. Quinton Byfield, C, Los Angeles

Aug. 19, 2002 | 6-foot-4 | 215 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 10

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

12. Cale Makar, D, Colorado

Oct. 30, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 13

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

13. Miro Heiskanen, D, Dallas

July 18, 1999 | 6-foot-1 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 14

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

14. Tim Stuetzle, C, Ottawa

Jan. 15, 2002 | 6-foot-1 | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 15

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

15. Trevor Zegras, C, Anaheim

March 20, 2001 | six-foot | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 23

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Special

Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

Calling four-fifths of these players projected stars is not much of a stretch as Heiskanen, Quinn Hughes and Tkachuk represented their teams as all-stars last season, and Makar arguably should have. Stuetzle was the third pick in the most recent draft and projects as a star No. 1 center for Ottawa. Tkachuk projects as one of the league's hardest to play against forwards who can put up points. Heiskanen is a mobile and extremely intelligent two-way defenseman, whereas Quinn Hughes and Makar are two of the most talented defensemen in the league.

Byfield moves down to this tier from Tier 2. It's an incremental change, but one I think is fair. He's an extremely talented player and works hard, he has been great in the OHL, but he has struggled to be a top player at the international level.

Zegras moves up to this tier following his MVP performance at the world juniors. His combination of skill and IQ is exceptional, and I see him becoming a critical part of Anaheim's rebuild. There is some concern he hasn't been an elite producer at the club level, but he's so gifted that you feel like it will come.

Tier 4: Bubble of NHL all-star and top of lineup player

16. Kirby Dach, C, Chicago

Jan. 21, 2001 | 6-foot-4 | 198 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 16

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

17. Pierre-Luc Dubois, C, Columbus

June 24, 1998 | 6-foot-3 | 207 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 18

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

18. Dylan Cozens, C, Buffalo

Feb. 9, 2001 | 6-foot-3 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 26

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

19. Robert Thomas, C, St. Louis

July 2, 1999 | six-foot | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 20

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end



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Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

20. Nico Hischier, C, New Jersey

Jan. 4, 1999 | 6-foot-1 | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 21

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

21. Mikhail Sergachev, D, Tampa Bay

June 25, 1998 | 6-foot-3 | 216 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 22

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

22. Barrett Hayton, C, Arizona

June 9, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 25

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: High-end
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

23. Connor McMichael, C, Washington

Jan. 15, 2001 | six-foot | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 66

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

McMichael continues to climb up my lists the more I watch him. The skating for his size is a concern, but he's so skilled and smart, and he is a driver for good teams consistently. I think he will be a scorer in the NHL and an important player for Washington in a short amount of time.

Tier 5: Top-line forward, top-pair defenseman or good starting goaltender

24. Lucas Raymond, RW, Detroit

March 28, 2002 | 5-foot-10 | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 17

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Elite
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Above-average

25. Nick Suzuki, C, Montreal

Aug. 10, 1999 | 5-foot-11 | 183 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 27

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

26. Adam Fox, D, New York Rangers

Feb. 17, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 28

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: High-end
Compete: Average

27. Moritz Seider, D, Detroit

April 6, 2001 | 6-foot-4 | 207 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 38

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

28. Arthur Kaliyev, RW, Los Angeles

June 26, 2001 | 6-foot-2 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 57

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

29. Jamie Drysdale, D, Anaheim

April 8, 2002 | 5-foot-11 | 175 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 34

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

30. Cole Perfetti, C, Winnipeg

Jan. 1, 2002 | 5-foot-11 | 177 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 19

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

31. Martin Necas, RW, Carolina

Jan. 15, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 35

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average



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Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

32. Alexander Holtz, RW, New Jersey

Jan. 23, 2002 | six-foot | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 29

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

33. Jesperi Kotkaniemi, C, Montreal

July 6, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 33

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

34. Josh Norris, C, Ottawa

May 5, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 36

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

35. Samuel Girard, D, Colorado

May 12, 1998 | 5-foot-10 | 161 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 37

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average

36. Alex Formenton, LW, Ottawa

Sept. 13, 1999 | 6-foot-3 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 40

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

37. Joel Farabee, LW, Philadelphia

Feb. 25, 2000 | six-foot | 163 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 41

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Above-average

38. Drake Batherson, RW, Ottawa

April 27, 1998 | 6-foot-3 | 196 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 42

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

39. Filip Chytil, C, New York Rangers

Sept. 5, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 203 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 44

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Average

40. Jakob Chychrun, D, Arizona

March 31, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 209 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 45

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

41. Bowen Byram, D, Colorado

June 13, 2001 | 6-foot-1 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 31

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

42. Grigori Denisenko, LW, Florida

June 24, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 43

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

43. Matthew Boldy, LW, Minnesota

April 5, 2001 | 6-foot-2 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 72

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

44. Jake Sanderson, D, Ottawa

July 8, 2002 | 6-foot-2 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 58

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average



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Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

45. Yaroslav Askarov, G, Nashville

June 16, 2002 | 6-foot-3 | 176 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 46

Athleticism: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average

46. Carter Hart, G, Philadelphia

Aug. 13, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 47

Athleticism: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average

47. Alexander Romanov, D, Montreal

Jan. 6, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 48

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

48. Cole Caufield, RW, Montreal

Jan. 2, 2001 | 5-foot-7 | 163 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 49

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

Raymond moves down an inch for me. He's had a very good season between the SHL and Sweden's U20 team. He's been a useful player on a top SHL team and was one of Sweden's top forwards. I can't say he's blown the doors down at either level and there remain concerns about how his skating will translate to higher levels. But he's an offensive dynamo with the puck who competes at a high level. Another Detroit prospect, Seider, continues to move up my list after a fantastic season for a top team in the SHL. His puck-moving has been a lot better this season.

Boldy, after building on his great second half with a strong start at BC and a great world juniors, moves up to this tier, which is where I had him as a draft-eligible but nudged him down after his freshman season. He's a very entertaining and determined player to watch even if he lacks speed.

Sanderson also continues to build off the second half of his draft season with a strong first few college games and a great World Junior tournament, providing more evidence for what led to him being the No. 5 pick as a very well-rounded defender.

Kaliyev moves into this tier as he continues to show he can be a top performer wherever he goes because of his tremendous hockey sense and shot, and despite his game

lacking speed and physicality. I think he's going to score a lot in the NHL.

I moved Perfetti down a nudge because of how he handled the faster pace of the U20 level, but I still saw a ton of skill and playmaking in his game and think he's a great player.

Tier 6: Bubble of top-line or pairing and second-line or pairing

49. Owen Tippett, RW, Florida

Feb. 16, 1999 | 6-foot-1 | 201 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 51

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

50. Kirill Marchenko, RW, Columbus

July 21, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 69

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

51. Clayton Keller, LW, Arizona

July 29, 1998 | 5-foot-10 | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 54

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

52. Samuel Fagemo, LW, Los Angeles

March 14, 2000 | six-foot | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 32

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

53. Adam Boqvist, D, Chicago

Aug. 15, 2000 | six-foot | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 55

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

54. Victor Soderstrom, D, Arizona

Feb. 26, 2001 | six-foot | 196 pounds



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Previous ranking: No. 56

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

55. Erik Brannstrom, D, Ottawa

Sept. 2, 1999 | 5-foot-10 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 59

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average

56. Vasili Podkolzin, RW, Vancouver

June 24, 2001 | 6-foot-1 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 39

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

57. Dawson Mercer, C, New Jersey

Oct. 27, 2001 | six-foot | 180 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 65

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

58. Filip Hronek, D, Detroit

Nov. 2, 1997 | six-foot | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 61

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

59. Nils Lundkvist, D, New York Rangers

July 27, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 77

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

60. Nick Robertson, LW, Toronto

Sept. 11, 2001 | 5-foot-9 | 161 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 62

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: High-end

61. Dillon Dube, LW, Calgary

July 20, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 183 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 63

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

62. Ty Smith, D, New Jersey

March 24, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 179 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 64

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

63. Thomas Harley, D, Dallas

Aug. 19, 2001 | 6-foot-3 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 67

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

64. Nolan Patrick, C, Philadelphia

Sept. 19, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 198 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 68

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

65. Cody Glass, C, Vegas

April 1, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 70

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average

66. Filip Zadina, RW, Detroit

Nov. 27, 1999 | six-foot | 196 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 71

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: High-end
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

67. Morgan Frost, C, Philadelphia

May 14, 1999 | 5-foot-11 | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 73



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Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average

68. Noah Dobson, D, New York Islanders

Jan. 7, 2000 | 6-foot-4 | 183 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 74

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

69. Peyton Krebs, C, Vegas

Jan. 26, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 113

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Above-average

70. Seth Jarvis, C, Carolina

Feb. 1, 2002 | 5-foot-10 | 175 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 75

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: High-end

71. Jesper Bratt, RW, New Jersey

July 30, 1998 | 5-foot-10 | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 79

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

72. Henri Jokiharju, D, Buffalo

June 17, 1999 | six-foot | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 80

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

73. Rasmus Sandin, D, Toronto

March 7, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 76

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

74. Ville Heinola, D, Winnipeg

March 2, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

75. Rodion Amirov, LW, Toronto

Oct. 2, 2001 | six-foot | 167 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 81

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

76. Jake Bean, D, Carolina

June 9, 1998 | 6-foot-1 | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 78

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

77. Marco Rossi, C, Minnesota

Sept. 23, 2001 | 5-foot-9 | 183 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 50

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

78. Spencer Knight, G, Florida

April 19, 2001 | 6-foot-3 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 82

Athleticism: Average
Hockey Sense: Average

79. Hendrix Lapierre, C, Washington

Feb. 9, 2002 | six-foot | 179 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 83

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

Podkolzin moves down a bit as he continues to wait for a breakthrough versus men, albeit on a very strong KHL team. With his so-so skating and what I'm coming to realize is a lack of truly dynamic offensive ability, he might never pop at a high scoring level, but I still see enough skill and a workhorse, which I think will translate into a good NHL player.

Fagemo hasn't had the most productive season in the Allsvenskan as a 20-year-old, which isn't ideal, but he's still



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looked very good and shown all the tools I saw last season. I adjusted his slotting a little bit to account for his season.

Rossi is one that I'm sure to get strong feedback on. Given his size and lack of great speed, a big part of me ranking him a tier higher and No. 9 going into the draft was his great skill, compete level and production in the OHL. There's always a part of your brain when you rank an undersized junior player without elite speed highly that questions how does it translate to a better level, and his showing at the world juniors made those concerns more evident.

I've been a Heinola skeptic, so I'm sure the Jets fans will be lobbing "I told you so's" at me for this one. Between his great play in Liiga this season and his fantastic World Junior, I'm more sold on the player and have upgraded his hockey sense grade. The skating for his size is still a concern, but as he showed in NHL camp last season, he seems to find a way to translate to the higher levels because of how smart he is.

Krebs was excellent for Team Canada and built off the second half of his WHL season. He's a well-rounded player and will be a coach and fan-favorite because of his skill and compete level, even if he's not the fastest.

Tier 7: Second-line forward, second-pair defenseman or starting goaltender

80. Jesse Puljujarvi, RW, Edmonton

May 7, 1998 | 6-foot-4 | 201 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 84

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

81. Casey Mittelstadt, C, Buffalo

Nov. 22, 1998 | 6-foot-1 | 203 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 85

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

82. Jordan Kyrou, RW, St. Louis

May 5, 1998 | six-foot | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 86

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

83. Nicolas Hague, D, Vegas

Dec. 5, 1998 | 6-foot-6 | 214 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 87

Skating: Poor
Puck Skills: Below-average

Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

84. Juuso Valimaki, D, Calgary

Oct. 6, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 205 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 112

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

85. Philip Broberg, D, Edmonton

June 25, 2001 | 6-foot-3 | 203 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 52

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Average

86. Alex Newhook, C, Colorado

Jan. 28, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 53

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

87. Ryan Merkley, D, San Jose

Aug. 14, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 176 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 88

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: High-end
Compete: Below-average

88. Alex Turcotte, C, Los Angeles

Feb. 26, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 89

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

89. Sam Steel, C, Anaheim

Feb. 3, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 91

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

90. Maxime Comtois, LW, Anaheim

Jan. 8, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 207 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 92



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Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

91. Brett Howden, C, New York Rangers

March 29, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 93

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

92. Philip Tomasino, C, Nashville

July 28, 2001 | six-foot | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 118

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

93. Gabriel Vilardi, C, Los Angeles

Aug. 16, 1999 | 6-foot-3 | 201 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 95

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

94. Shane Pinto, C, Ottawa

November 12, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. NR

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

95. Alexandre Texier, LW, Columbus

Sept. 13, 1999 | six-foot | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 103

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

96. Anton Lundell, C, Florida

Oct. 3, 2001 | 6-foot-1 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 104

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

97. Jack Quinn, RW, Buffalo

Sept. 19, 2001 | six-foot | 176 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 97

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

98. Nolan Foote, LW, New Jersey

Nov. 29, 2000 | 6-foot-4 | 201 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 99

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

99. Jan Jenik, RW, Arizona

Sept. 15, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 98

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

100. Oliver Wahlstrom, RW, New York Islanders

June 13, 2000 | six-foot | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 105

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

101. Matias Maccelli, LW, Arizona

Oct. 13, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 165 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

102. Dante Fabbro, D, Nashville

June 20, 1998 | six-foot | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 108

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

103. Nils Hoglander, LW, Vancouver

Dec. 20, 2000 | 5-foot-9 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 136

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Elite



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Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Above-average

104. Calen Addison, D, Minnesota

April 11, 2000 | 5-foot-10 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 102

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average

105. Connor Zary, C, Calgary

Sept. 25, 2001 | six-foot | 178 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 60

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

106. Brendan Brisson, C, Vegas

Oct. 22, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 179 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 96

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

107. John Leonard, C, San Jose

Aug. 7, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 107

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

108. Cam York, D, Philadelphia

Jan. 5, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 151

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

109. Bobby Brink, RW, Philadelphia

July 8, 2001 | 5-foot-8 | 163 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 155

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average

110. Scott Perunovich, D, St. Louis

Aug. 18, 1998 | 5-foot-10 | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 109

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average

111. Kailer Yamamoto, RW, Edmonton

Sept. 29, 1998 | 5-foot-8 | 159 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 116

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

112. Jacob Perreault, RW, Anaheim

April 15, 2002 | 5-foot-11 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 111

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

113. Shakir Mukhamadullin, D, New Jersey

Jan. 10, 2002 | 6-foot-3 | 178 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 125

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

114. Mathias Emilio Pettersen, C, Calgary

April 3, 2000 | 5-foot-10 | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 114

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Below-average

115. Kevin Bahl, D, New Jersey

June 27, 2000 | 6-foot-7 | 240 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 115

Skating: Poor
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

116. Lukas Reichel, LW, Chicago

May 17, 2002 | six-foot | 170 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 117

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

117. Evan Bouchard, D, Edmonton



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Oct. 20, 1999 | 6-foot-3 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 134

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

118. Egor Zamula, D, Philadelphia

March 30, 2000 | 6-foot-3 | 176 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 119

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

119. Alexander Nylander, RW, Chicago

March 2, 1998 | 6-foot-1 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 120

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

120. Jack Studnicka, C, Boston

Feb. 18, 1999 | 6-foot-1 | 172 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 121

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

121. Liam Foudy, C, Columbus

Feb. 4, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 122

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

122. Mario Ferraro, D, San Jose

Sept. 17, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 126

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

123. Ty Dellandrea, C, Dallas

July 21, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 128

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average

Hockey Sense: Average

Compete: Average

Shot: Above-average

124. Mavrik Bourque, C, Dallas

Jan. 8, 2002 | 5-foot-10 | 178 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 127

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

125. Braden Schneider, D, New York Rangers

Sept. 20, 2001 | 6-foot-2 | 202 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 138

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

126. Rasmus Kupari, C, Los Angeles

March 15, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 130

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Average

127. Max Jones, LW, Anaheim

Feb. 17, 1998 | 6-foot-3 | 220 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 131

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Above-average

128. Dominik Bokk, RW, Carolina

Feb. 3, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 187 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 140

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Poor
Shot: Above-average

129. Ivan Morozov, C, Vegas

May 5, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 196 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

130. Dmitri Voronkov, C, Columbus



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September 10, 2000 | 6-foot-3 | 190 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

131. Jack Dugan, RW, Vegas

March 24, 1998 | 6-foot-2 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 133

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Below-average

132. Justin Barron, D, Colorado

Nov. 15, 2001 | 6-foot-2 | 195 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 135

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

133. Ryan Suzuki, C, Carolina

May 28, 2001 | six-foot | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 100

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

134. Raphael Lavoie, RW, Edmonton

Sept. 25, 2000 | 6-foot-4 | 198 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 150

Skating: Poor
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Poor
Shot: Above-average

135. Dylan Samberg, D, Winnipeg

Jan. 14, 1999 | 6-foot-4 | 216 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 139

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Average

136. Tyson Jost, C, Colorado

March 14, 1998 | 5-foot-11 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 141

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average

Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average

137. Emil Bemstrom, RW, Columbus

June 1, 1999 | 5-foot-10 | 181 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 142

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

138. Victor Mete, D, Montreal

June 7, 1998 | 5-foot-9 | 183 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 143

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

139. Tyler Madden, C, Los Angeles

Nov. 9, 1999 | 5-foot-11 | 152 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 144

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

140. Samuel Poulin, RW, Pittsburgh

Feb. 25, 2001 | 6-foot-1 | 216 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 146

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

141. Adam Beckman, LW, Minnesota

May 10, 2001 | 6-foot-1 | 179 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 147

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: High-end

142. Ryan Johnson, D, Buffalo

July 24, 2001 | six-foot | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

143. Joel Hofer, G, St. Louis

July 30, 2000 | 6-foot-5 | 172 pounds



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Previous ranking: No. 148

Athleticism: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average

144. Thomas Bordeleau, C, San Jose

January 3, 2002 | 5-foot-10 | 175 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average
Shot: Above-average

145. John-Jason Peterka, LW, Buffalo

Jan. 14, 2002 | 5-foot-11 | 192 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 132

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

146. Jason Robertson, LW, Dallas

July 22, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 201 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 149

Skating: Poor
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

147. Ian Mitchell, D, Chicago

Jan. 18, 1999 | 5-foot-11 | 174 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 152

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

148. Ridly Greig, C, Ottawa

Aug. 8, 2002 | 5-foot-11 | 163 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 153

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

149. Roni Hirvonen, C, Toronto

Jan. 10, 2002 | 5-foot-9 | 172 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

150. Ryan Poehling, C, Montreal

Jan. 3, 1999 | 6-foot-2 | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: No. 154

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

151. Jacob Bernard-Docker, D, Ottawa

June 30, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 194 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

152. Devon Levi, G, Florida

December 7, 2001 | six-foot | 185 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Athleticism: Average
Hockey Sense: Above-average

153. Jakob Pelletier, LW, Calgary

March 7, 2001 | 5-foot-9 | 161 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

154. Topi Niemela, D, Toronto

March 25, 2002 | 5-foot-11 | 165 pounds

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

The additions to this group were Arizona's Maccelli, Ottawa's Pinto, San Jose's Bordeleau, Vegas' Morozov, Columbus' Voronkov, Toronto's Hirvonen, Calgary's Pelletier, Ottawa's Bernard-Docker, Buffalo's Johnson, Toronto's Niemela and Florida's Levi.

Removed were Nashville forward Eeli Tolvanen, New York Rangers forward Vitaly Kravtsov, St. Louis forward Klim Kostin and Minnesota forward Alexander Khovanov, all of whom haven't had overly impressive seasons in the KHL. For Tolvanen and Khovanov, there are concerns over size and skating, but they have great skill and scoring ability. Kravtsov's concerns are over skating and compete level, but he has elite skill. And Kostin's offensive upside remains a question even though he can skate like an NHLer.

Los Angeles defenseman Tobias Bjornfot was removed as questions continue to linger about his offensive upside despite his great skating. Carolina forward Noel Gunler was removed because of concerns over his foot speed and



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compete level, but he does have a big shot and can make plays. Edmonton forward Dylan Holloway was also removed.

Maccelli and Pinto continued to build off strong 2019-20 seasons, as top players for top teams in Liiga and the NCAA, respectively. Pinto has shown more skill as the years have gone on. Maccelli has shown great playmaking and finishing ability despite so-so skating. Fellow Senators and NoDak prospect Bernard-Docker has also grown on me because he has enough offense to go with his skating and physicality.

Morozov and Voronkov have both been impressive in the KHL and with Russia's national team. Voronkov continues to trend up after going undrafted in 2018 and then a mid-round pick in 2019. He's a big, physical center with some touch. Morozov's skill and work ethic continue to stand out as he grows into a good pro.

Bordeleau looked very good in the first half for Michigan, with his skill on display more consistently than it was in junior hockey and being one of the better players in the Big Ten. Hirvonen is an average skating 5-foot-9 forward, but he makes so many plays and he's produced at a high level the last two seasons between the club and international level.

Johnson's season has been strong between the Gophers and Team USA. His great skating shows how his game will translate to higher levels, and the offense in his game has been good at both levels, which was the question in junior. He's a pass-first type offensively but with his skating he could excel in that role in the NHL.

The two Toronto Finns, Hirvonen and Niemela, followed good draft seasons and great U18 5 Nations last February with great world juniors performances. Both have shown well versus men, too. They don't have the typical toolkits that pop for this range, but they both have great hockey sense and just seem to gain responsibility from coaches and put up numbers.

Newhook moves down a nudge into this group. I love the speed and energy he brings to shifts and I see a lot of skill, but I'm not as sold as I was when he was 16 and 17 that he can be an offensive impact player at the higher levels as opposed to a solid second-line player.

Flames pick Zary moves down a tier after the U20 level exposed his skating a bit, although I still like his skill level a lot. On the other side, I've moved fellow Flames pick Pelletier into this range. I have my concerns on Pelletier's skill level, but he works, he's very intelligent, coaches love him and he continues to score in bunches wherever he goes.

Oilers fans won't like me much for downgrading Broberg and Holloway. Broberg was moved down a tier. I still like his

great skating and see some offense in his game, but at some point he needs to elevate his game as he hasn't really exceeded at any level for the past 18 months. Holloway is a similar player in terms of strengths and weaknesses. He has speed, size, compete and skill, but he doesn't make a ton of plays. Those concerns lingered for me into the draft where I still had him in this range, but the more I've watched him this season, the more I see a third-line forward offensively.

Finally, Levi cracks the list. I know, I know. He was just picked in the seventh round a few months ago. This could be a classic overreaction to the World Junior tournament. But he was so good there that it made me go back and check his games from last season and it validated what I saw in Edmonton. I think this is a very good player despite his size.

Prospects who missed the age cut

Kirill Kaprizov, F, Minnesota

April 26, 1997 | 5-foot-10 | 201 pounds

Skating: Above-average

Puck Skills: Average

Hockey Sense: Average

Compete: Above-average

Alex Barre-Boulet, C, Tampa Bay

May 21, 1997 | 5-foot-10 | 170 pounds

Skating: Average

Puck Skills: Above-average

Hockey Sense: Average

Compete: Average

Shot: Above-average

Ilya Sorokin, G, New York Islanders

Aug. 4, 1995 | 6-foot-2 | 176 pounds

Athleticism: Average

Hockey sense: Above-average

Kyle Capobianco, D, Arizona

Aug. 13, 1997 | 6-foot-1 | 196 pounds

Skating: Average

Puck Skills: Below-average

Hockey Sense: Average

Compete: Average

Kaprizov would be between Chychrun (40) and Bowen Byram (41). Barre-Boulet would be between Merkley (87) and Turcotte (88). Sorokin would be between Pettersen (114) and Bahl (115). And Capobianco would be between Lavoie (134) and Samberg (135).



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Hurricanes camp observations: Should Carolina trade for a PP sniper?

By Sara Civian

Remember that time I told you you're allowed to care about training camp this year?

I still urge you to do so, but a source very close to the situation is asking us to at least leave the lines out of it.

"As far as the lines, you guys know," Rod Brind'Amour said Tuesday. "I laugh when I read about these other places talking about lineup combinations, everybody's freaking out about things. There's probably no chance that the lines I laid out now are how they're gonna be. I mean, I doubt it, and if it happens. We haven't even really talked about how our lines are going to shake out Day 1 because we want to get a bunch of looks, so don't read into that too much."

So yeah, don't freak out that Andrei Svechnikov is flirting with the second line or whatever else you're freaking out about. But you can care a little, I promise. If nothing else, these early camp lines show us what kinds of "looks" the Canes coaching staff are trying to get, and that gives us a little look behind the curtain.

Caring an appropriate amount about the lines

The Hurricanes have rolled out the same line combinations through the first four days of training camp.

Nino Niederreiter-Sebastian Aho-Teuvo Teravainen
Andrei Svechnikov-Vincent Trocheck-Jesper Fast
Warren Foegele-Jordan Staal-Martin Necas
Ryan Dzingel-Jordan Martinook/Morgan Geekie-Brock McGinn

Jacob Slavin-Doug Hamilton
Brady Skjei-Brett Pesce
Jake Gardiner-Haydn Fleury

Again, Brind'Amour said there's "probably no chance" the opening night lines are as they appear, but he also said he's trying to see a few things. Niederreiter's first-line status immediately comes to mind — left-wing depth is one of the most confusing aspects for the Canes right now. They know what they have in Svechnikov, but could Niederreiter get some of that 2018-19 magic back in a first-line situation? Or could Dzingel force himself off of the fourth line?

The Jesper Fast and Martin Necas placements are sort of the same thing — I'd guess the Canes have an original hypothesis that Fast will serve as Williams' replacement on the Jordan Staal line, and they know they can default to that. So why not see what else the new guy can do?

Power Play 1:

Aho, Teravainen, Svechnikov, Trocheck, Hamilton

Power Play 2:

Dzingel, Staal, Niederreiter, Necas, Gardiner

No offense to anyone currently on the second power-play unit, but I will say my first reaction when I saw it was "I finally understand the Patrik Laine rumors." Do I think the Hurricanes should trade Pesce (and a package of other things) for Laine?

Absolutely not. Do I think a sniper needs to emerge, somehow? Yes.

I very well think it could be Necas, and he did have five power-play goals in very limited time last season. But I also think if he's going to be that second power-play sniper then the Canes need to express that to him.

Taxi squad chronicles

It has been refreshing covering Brind'Amour as a coach, because he's confident enough to admit when he doesn't know something. We're all trying to wrap our heads around the idea of the taxi squad this season, Brind'Amour included.

"We have beat this around a lot already and nobody really has a for sure way to do it because of the uncertainty of everything," he said, when I asked him if the Hurricanes' strategy will favor NHL experience or prospect potential. "Normally you'd say 'We're not going to have five injuries,' but with COVID going on you don't know if five guys get taken out, right? So you gotta have five guys ready, then you don't want your top prospects not playing. So is it better to have them down, playing in the AHL, getting better? What do you think?"

I can say with 100 percent certainty that there isn't a taxi squad thought that has crossed my mind that Brind'Amour hasn't already thought about. But I'd bet we're on the same page about the best course of action: Heavy on the veterans, but give Bean or at least one promising prospect teetering the NHL line a chance. The NHL team you put on the ice is obviously of utmost importance, and at the end of the day the main priority is strategically stacking the taxi squad with the most competency as possible.

But, it might be a good idea to ask some of the top prospects what they actually want to do for once. As detailed in the linked post, being on the taxi squad comes with certain limitations — not necessarily playing, not being paid an NHL salary and who knows about housing? Still, it's a chance at the NHL and such a unique situation.

I'd never act like I've thought of something innovative, but Brind'Amour did ask me what I think. So on top of everything else I'm sure he's already thought of, I'd consider asking some of the top prospects what they actually want to do.

"I think everyone's going to be (consulting each other) on everything this season," Brind'Amour said. "It's not just the taxi squad. I've had quite a few conversations with college hockey coaches this season about what they were experiencing. They've been playing, and they've all been shut down at times. So what are the real hurdles? I think everybody is trying to get information from everybody, and I don't think anyone has the great answer. But I think it's good to inform yourself on what everyone's trying to do. We're all still in that great unknown, and it is what it is, but everyone is trying to be prepared."

Smart people use their resources.

Speaking of the AHL ...

The Hurricanes and the Predators will share an affiliation with the Chicago Wolves, the league announced Thursday.



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"This season presents a unique situation, with NHL teams having taxi squads and some AHL teams opting out," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We were able to come to an agreement with the Predators and Wolves that we believe benefits everyone involved. The Wolves have been great partners and we're thankful for their willingness to work out this agreement."

Much like the helmet decals and the sponsored divisions, this is another thing I shrug at. Do what you have to do to play the season. The Predators' affiliate, the Milwaukee Admirals, were one of three teams that opted out of the AHL season this year.

I will say I immediately thought of Predators prospect and Raleigh Native Josh Wilkins. Maybe this breach of the space-time continuum will make him a Hurricane.

Brett and Brian Pesce are back

Two equally important things to announce, here: Brett Pesce is back to himself, feeling 100 percent after inevitable shoulder surgery sidelined him for the playoffs. And his dad is back on Twitter.

"People, I think, take Pesh for granted about how good he is," Martinook said Wednesday. "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 ... He's always smiling when he comes to the rink. 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."

This is why I say "screw the second power play unit, don't trade Pesce for Laine."

But we'll see what the next four days entail.



Carolina Hurricanes are back! Where are they on TV?

By Joe Ovies

The Carolina Hurricanes are back! But, uh, where are they on television?

FOX Sports Carolinas, which is owned by Sinclair Broadcasting Group, is currently unavailable on many of the live television streaming services fans have migrated towards in recent years. With seemingly no carriage agreement on the horizon, viewers have a decision to make if they want to watch 54 of the 56 games scheduled to be broadcast on the regional sports network.

I did my best to break down the available options.

Option 1: 99.9FM The Fan

What, did you think I wasn't going to tell you every Canes games can be heard on the flagship? I am a company man after all. Use your theater of the mind or act out the action with a bubble hockey table while listening to a simulcast of Mike Maniscalco and Tripp Tracy on FOX Sports Carolinas. The Fan's Alec Campbell will get you ready for each game 30 minutes before face-off and recap it all following the final horn. Don't forget to download the Canes Corner Podcast with Adam Gold.

Option 2: Cable or satellite

FOX Sports Carolinas is currently available on specific subscription tiers. Canes fans in their home market can use Spectrum or AT&T TV cable services. The channel is also available on DirecTV satellite service.

I know what you're thinking. "I moved away from cable to save money!" In an ironic twist, going back to a cable bundle might save you money compared to the collection of streaming

services you've signed up for during your cord-cutting journey. However, there is a matter of those pesky contracts locking you in to the service for up to two years.

Option 3: OTT streaming service

FOX Sports South is available on the "Max" tier of AT&T TV Now.

YouTube TV, Hulu + Live TV, FuboTV and Sling TV are currently in a carriage dispute with Sinclair Broadcast Group over their regional sports networks. In late 2020, FOX Sports South and FOX Sports Carolinas were removed from the streaming services and left many fans waiting to see how negotiations would play before the start of the season. While these disputes usually resolve at the 11th hour (see many of the ACC Network agreements before its launch), this doesn't seem to be the case between Sinclair and those streaming services.

Option 4: Borrow login credentials

I'm not saying. I'm just saying.

The FOX Sports GO app can be downloaded on various smart devices and your television. If you know someone who uses any of participating pay-TV providers, you could "borrow" their login credentials to watch the Canes.

A word of caution using borrowed login credentials. Pay-TV providers can use a combination of location-based services and determination of your internet service provider to prevent such use.

Option 5: NHL.TV and VPN



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If you're an out-of-market Canes fans, NHL.TV is great option to watch live games. However, the Canes broadcast is subject to local blackout rules. The solution is to purchase a VPN (virtual private network) service. The VPN will spoof your location by connecting to an IP address outside the in-market area, thus allowing you to watch NHL.TV as though you were out-of-market. The VPN service must be turned on before

logging into NHL.TV and you can turn it off any time after you're done watching a game.

Not illegal, but certainly frowned upon.

Option 6: (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Come on. I'm not going to tell you what websites might have illegal streams, but I will tell you they exist.



Notebook: Canes Hit Halfway Mark of Camp

Brind'Amour: 'I've certainly appreciated the work that the guys have put in'

by Michael Smith

Even though on-ice instruction began just earlier this week, the Carolina Hurricanes are already at the halfway mark of training camp, and in exactly a week, the puck will drop in Detroit on the 56-game 2020-21 schedule.

That's a short runway for the Canes to get revved up and game ready, so first four practice days have been high-paced and methodical, similar to the quick ramp up prior to playoffs in the bubble.

"We're very business-like, which is good. We know we have to get better, and time is short here," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I've certainly appreciated the work that the guys have put in."

Each day's practice has built upon the one before it, and each drill has addressed a specific aspect of the Canes' system. Special teams work has seen a steady increase from breakouts to running full possessions. On Thursday, the Canes "scrimmaged" in quick 35-second shifts.

Practicing with a group of 23 skaters - smaller than the typical training camp - the team has been efficient and purposeful in its execution during the 60-75 minute skates. There are only eight training camp practices on the schedule, after all.

"You're not doing the first couple of days where you're just out there working to work. These days, you're out there working for a purpose," Jordan Martinook said. "Everything we're doing is covering our whole game. Each day we've had different things we're trying to accomplish, and it's gone pretty well."

In the coming days, the Canes plan to scrimmage at least once, according to Brind'Amour, who discussed with his staff on Thursday morning when might be the optimal time to do so.

"I think we need to have at least one of them just to feel like a game," he said. "I don't really expect it to be very intense. I'd like it to be, but those have really fallen off over the years."

An intrasquad scrimmage, though, is the best alternative in the absence of a full preseason schedule, let alone a single exhibition game.

Speaking of the preseason, what do the Canes think about skipping it this time around?

"It's not something we're used to. Personally, I think the older you get, the more boring the preseason might get, but at the same time, [exhibition games] are good and do help at times," Jordan Staal said. "For me, I'm excited to just get right into it."

"I think it's a con, honestly," Jacob Slavin said. "I think all the guys appreciate being able to play a couple to work out those little kinks, but I also know Roddy is going to run a camp to where we are ready to go without any preseason games."

"I hated playing preseason games as a player because, at the end of the day, they don't count. But I understand as a coach why you like them because you can try different things. It's kind of a freebie to go out and figure stuff out," Brind'Amour said. "The good news is that no one else is playing games, so I think we're all in the same boat. I think in the end, the players are going to like this."

Just drop the puck - and that's exactly what will happen in just a week's time.

Ch-Ch-Changes in the AHL

In early September, the Canes entered into a three-year affiliation agreement with the Chicago Wolves of the American Hockey League. On Thursday, it was announced that the affiliation would be split with the Nashville Predators for the 2020-21 season.

It's a move that makes sense given the current landscape of both leagues. The creation of the taxi squad in the NHL will take four to six players away from the AHL roster, while three AHL teams have elected to opt out of play in the 2020-21 season, opening the door for affiliation partnerships.

The current Wolves coaching staff will remain intact, and this includes head coach Ryan Warsofsky, who is leading on-ice



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instruction for the group of 15 players not practicing with the NHL group in Canes' training camp.

Not much, then, will change for the Canes' organization in this one-year partnership, but there is a chance that teammates in the AHL could then line up against one another in one of eight meetings between the Predators and Canes in the Central Division.

Hailing a Taxi

In the absence of true training camp competition - given the truncated schedule, the fewer number of players in town and the simple fact that the Canes essentially have their team already set - one of the more interesting roster decisions to track over the next week is the formation of the taxi squad.

Comprised of four to six players, including a third goaltender if one is not present on the 23-man active roster, this group will practice with the NHL club and can travel with the team, as needed. It's essentially an insurance policy given the

unpredictability of how COVID-19 might affect teams this season.

Final decisions don't have to be made quite yet, but the Canes have "beat this around a lot already," according to Brind'Amour. What's the strategy?

"Normally you'd say we're not going to have five injuries, but with COVID going on, you don't know if five guys could get taken out, so you've got to have five guys ready. Then, you don't want your young guys or prospects sitting around not playing, so is it better to have them down playing in the AHL?" he pondered. "It's all about the development for these guys. We've got to make sure we're doing it right. Practice is good, but they've got to play. Yet, we're worried about our team. I want the best guys available."

It certainly poses an interesting quandary, and it's something that, with the input of President and General Manager Don Waddell, I further explored in this week's installment of Tweetmail.

How to Watch Hurricanes Games on TV in the 2020-21 Season

FOX Sports Carolinas will televise 54 games

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes will soon drop the puck on their 2020-21 season, a 56-game schedule that begins on Thursday, Jan. 14 in Detroit at 7:30 p.m.

So, how can you watch that game and the rest of this season on television?

FOX Sports Carolinas is the exclusive regional broadcaster of the Canes, and that's where you will find 54 of the team's 56 games in the 2020-21 season, while NBCSN will televise two games nationally.

Though FOX Sports Carolinas remains widely available in the region, viewing options are currently more limited, as FOX regional sports networks (RSNs) are no longer available on streaming services like YouTube TV, Hulu + Live TV and Sling TV. Here's how you can watch Canes games on FOX Sports Carolinas this season.

I am an in-market Canes fan with cable. How can I watch games?

FOX Sports Carolinas is available on Spectrum's cable television packages. If your current television provider, like AT&T U-Verse or Google Fiber, includes FOX Sports Carolinas, you will also be able to watch games.

I am an in-market Canes fan with satellite. How can I watch games?

FOX Sports Carolinas is available on DirecTV.

I am an in-market Canes fan who has cut the cord. How can I watch the games?

There are streaming options for cord cutters, but those options are now more limited. Popular streaming services like YouTube TV, Hulu + Live TV and Sling TV do not currently carry FOX regional sports networks.

Do I have any streaming options if I am an in-market Canes fan?

AT&T has two streaming options: AT&T TV and AT&T TV Now.

AT&T TV is more similar to a cable or satellite subscription in that it requires a two-year contract and includes a streaming box. AT&T TV's Choice package includes FOX RSNs.

AT&T TV Now is the typical cord-cutting option in that there is no annual contract or included equipment. AT&T TV Now's Max package includes FOX RSNs.

Can I still watch games on FOX Sports GO?

You can watch live Canes game telecasts on your mobile device via the FOX Sports GO app if you are a customer of a participating pay-TV provider, like Spectrum, DirecTV or AT&T, and receive FOX Sports Carolinas as a part of your channel lineup.

I am an out-of-market Canes fan. How can I watch games?

You have two subscription options.

If you have a cable or satellite package, you can add NHL Center Ice to your service.

If you don't have a cable or satellite package, you can subscribe to NHL.tv.

Can I watch Canes games on NHL.tv if I live in market?

Local blackout restrictions apply, but you can access full-length game replays 48 hours later.

What about radio?

All Canes games can be heard on the team's flagship radio station 99.9 The Fan and occasionally its sister network Buzz Sports Radio. The Hurricanes Radio Network also includes 730 The Game ESPN Charlotte, ESPN New Bern and ESPN Greenville.



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Canes fans outside the Network's listening area can hear live simulcasts on Hurricanes.com and through the Canes' mobile app. SiriusXM satellite radio also carries game broadcasts.



NHL's Top 12 UFAs of 2021: Rumours around big contract years

By Luke Fox

A star-studded group featuring future Hall of Famers, team captains, No. 1 goalies and defencemen, and league MVP winners are all playing without guaranteed employment in 2021-22.

Yep, we're talking critical contract years here. With just 56 games to impress (or disappoint), the pressure to perform will intensify — and could have a direct impact on these players' financial future.

This group has been well and able to ink extensions with their current clubs for months, and we've already seen the Minnesota Wild (Jonas Brodin, seven years at \$6 million) and Montreal Canadiens (Jeff Petry, four years and \$6.25 million; Brendan Gallagher, six years, \$22.5 million) take care of business early — slightly weakening 2021's UFA crop in the process.

Unlike past seasons, general managers already know the 2021-22 cap ceiling (flat at \$81.5 million) and can start mapping a roster for the future or start identifying impending UFAs they'll be hard-pressed to afford.

Here is a preview of July 28, 2021's class of unrestricted free agents, featuring a round-up of the latest buzz surrounding their next deals.

1. Alex Ovechkin
Age on July 28: 35
Position: Left wing
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$9.5 million

The latest: If Ovechkin (706) is serious about taking a run at Wayne Gretzky's all-time goals record (894), he'll need a fresh multi-year commitment from the franchise that drafted him first overall way back in 2004. It's blasphemous to envision the Great Eight in any other sweater.

Nicklas Backstrom and Ovechkin have expressed a mutual desire to play alongside each other for as long as possible, and the centreman negotiated his own \$46-million extension that should see him setting up Ovechkin's one-timer through 2024-25.

"My only concern going forward is that maybe Ovi might hire Nick to do his next contract," quipped GM Brian MacLellan, confident the sides will begin working on an extension this month.

The superstar is negotiating his own deal.

Ovechkin and MacLellan had a conversation upon the conclusion of 2019-20 to set the table for parameters of an extension.

In November, Ovechkin gave an interview, in his native tongue, to Russian Television International and addressed his vision for wrapping his playing career.

"It is not a question of money," the superstar said of his desire to remain in D.C. "It is just a matter of principal. I have only played for two teams, [KHL's Moscow] Dynamo and Washington. Obviously, I will stay with Washington for another two... three... four... five years. And then I would like to finish on a high note, to play my final game with Dynamo."

According to Russian outlet metaratings.ru, MacLellan has already floated a three- to five-year extension to the captain that would carry an AAV between \$9.5 million and \$10 million.

During training camp, Ovechkin was confident the sides would carve out time to talk turkey.

"I don't think we're in a rush. We've got plenty of time," Ovechkin said. "Whenever it's done, it's done."

2. Dougie Hamilton
Age on July 28: 28
Position: Defence
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$5.75 million

The latest: The Hurricanes traded for Hamilton, in part, because they liked his cost certainty. Well, after this sprint season, the price tag for the top defender in 2021's UFA class won't be so certain.

Hamilton will be due for a raise the same summer as breakout star Andrei Svechnikov (RFA), and Carolina already has four other D-men signed long-term at \$4 million-plus per year. Which is why you'll occasionally hear trade rumours around solid right shots like Brett Pesce and Hamilton, already on his third franchise.

In mid-November, GM Don Waddell said the sides were getting close to opening extension discussions.

"He is a UFA at the end of the year, so we'd like to get that one done sooner than later. [With] that one, you would have doubts if you play out the season, so it makes sense to try to get something done before the start of the season," said Waddell, per NHL.com's Tom Gulitti.

"You've got a flat cap for the next two years," Waddell went on. "We also know that the market's changed. I'm not saying we're not going to do a long-term deal, but the long-term deals, if you look at free agency, you've only got a few guys that got more than three years in the whole market.... So I think the market has changed, and it should change because of the situation we're all in."



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3. Taylor Hall

Age on July 28: 29

Position: Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$8 million

The latest: For the second straight off-season, Hall could become the most coveted unrestricted free agent on the market, thanks to his rare and surprising one-year, show-me deal with the Buffalo Sabres, desperate to end the NHL's longest active playoff drought.

"Things can turn pretty quick, especially if you have elite pieces like the Sabres do," said Hall, citing Colorado's accelerated rise from the league's basement. "Obviously, I'm betting on myself, but I'm betting that the Sabres can improve and have a good hockey season. If I didn't, I wouldn't be here.

"Honestly, the best thing for both sides is that this goes really well, and I'm a Sabre for a long time," he said.

Rookie GM Kevyn Adams says Hall's 2021 rental status doesn't preclude the two sides agreeing to a lengthier deal next off-season.

"We believe in Taylor as a player and a person, and we hope this turns into a long-term relationship for both sides that works," Adams said. "We'll see where that goes."

In Jack Eichel, Hall will be blessed with an elite playmaking centre in his prime. And in coach Ralph Krueger, Hall has been reunited with a favourite motivator and a man he trusts.

"If we get this atmosphere right, we get the results right, and he's having fun, that will be a major driver in him," Krueger said. "The end result will take care of itself. It's not the length of the contract that matters in this case; it's how the process evolves."

4. Tuukka Rask

Age on July 28: 34

Position: Goaltender

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$7 million

The latest: The question isn't whether Rask — a Vezina-winning, Cup-winning, Jennings-winning stud — is deserving of an extension. The question is whether he wants one.

Rask openly pondered 2021 retirement this past season and drew criticism in some (unkind) circles for departing the playoff bubble early to attend to a family matter and leaving the Bruins' crease to backup Jaroslav Halak.

"You have to respect his privacy and allow him the latitude to take care of [personal issues]," GM Don Sweeney maintained. "And ultimately it hasn't affected his play on the ice. We have good goaltending, and we'll continue to do so."

The flat cap might prevent Sweeney from offering Rask a raise in an off-season during which Boston will also face decisions on several other free agents, but it would be difficult to argue that an engaged Rask isn't worth at least \$7 million somewhere.

"I have no intention of playing anywhere else but the Bruins," Rask said on Jan. 6.

"I'm comfortable where we are. I just wanna start the season in a good groove, and if the talks happen during the season,

so be it. My main goal is to start season right, worry about future after."

5. Gabriel Landeskog

Age on July 28: 28

Position: Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$5.57 million

The latest: True, the budget-conscious Avalanche have a track record of dealing away talent before they hit payday: Paul Stastny, Ryan O'Reilly, Matt Duchene, Tyson Barrie....

But! Colorado has an open window to contend for the grand prize, and anything other than a long-term extension for the captain would rock the core in a bad way. Real dollars are more of a concern than cap space in Denver, so GM Joe Sakic should lock up Landeskog for the rest of his prime.

"Actually, back in Edmonton [during the 2020 playoffs], we started a dialogue," Sakic revealed in October. "We'll revisit that. We'd like to have something done during the year, but if it has to go through the year, we're confident we have a pretty good relationship with Gabe and that we'll be able to figure something out by next year.

"I think everyone's figuring out where the landscape is going to be in the next few years. The dialogue is going to continue, so hopefully we'll be able to extend."

How does seven years and \$49 million sound?

6. Frederik Andersen

Age on July 28: 31

Position: Goaltender

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$5 million

The latest: Andersen is easily the best netminder the Maple Leafs have employed since Ed Belfour, and yet there is much uncertainty surrounding his future with the franchise.

At the very least, GM Kyle Dubas entertained tire-kicking this off-season on his workhorse No. 1 netminder, a valuable asset whose likely raise in 2021-22 would strain the organization's salary structure. (Carolina was one team that inquired.) The executive was reportedly only interested in parting with Auston Matthews' parttime roomie for a top-four defenceman.

Andersen holds a 10-team no-trade clause. That he's collected a \$4-million signing bonus and will only command \$1 million in actual salary through 2020-21 makes his contract all the more enticing.

Trade or no trade, long-term commitments to core pieces like Andersen or Zach Hyman don't exactly feel imminent.

"Every one of these decisions takes on a more pronounced importance," Dubas said in the off-season. "We have space, but we don't have it in overabundance, and especially if things are going to be locked in for a couple years with the cap, we'll probably not be able to act as quickly as we'd like to with some of these guys coming up."

Andersen's thoughts on a second contract with the Leafs?

"Whatever's gonna happen, happens," he said, following the team's fourth consecutive post-season series loss.



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On Oct. 5, Dubas quieted some of the noise surrounding his goalie by stating that he expects Andersen to be the starter on opening night.

"I know where the Fred speculation started and comes from, and rather than address it publicly or be hostile about it, I just addressed it directly with Fred," said Dubas, who was irked that info went public.

"So, he and I have had many discussions over the last month or so about that. So, he knows where we stand directly."

Andersen reported to Toronto for training earlier than ever before.

"If I play well, things are going to be easier for me going forward. And if I play well, it'll be good for the team," Andersen said of his contract year. "My focus right now is just having fun with it. Enjoy being part of this group."

7. Jordan Binnington
Age on July 28: 28
Position: Goaltender
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$4.4 million

The latest: "You've got to be bold, because fortune favours the bold," Binnington explained of the bet-on-yourself bridge deal he signed after backstopping the Blues to their first championship.

After a stellar regular season in 2019-20, the brash, late-blooming goalie was force-fed some humble pie, going 0-5 with an .851 save percentage in his second post-season. Yikes.

Free of recency bias, St. Louis traded away the hotter goalie (Jake Allen) to Montreal, essentially reinforcing its faith that Binnington will carry the club in his contract season.

Unlike the case with Alex Pietrangolo, who ended up joining Vegas, the timing of Binnington's payday aligns nicely here. The cap-straining contracts of Alexander Steen, Carl Gunnarsson and Tyler Bozak will come off the Blues' books right when he asks for a raise.

Does he look nervous?

8. Kyle Palmieri
Age on July 28: 30
Position: Right wing / Left wing
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$4.65 million

The latest: An unsung star on a rebuilding team, the hardworking Palmieri is quietly riding a five-year streak of 20-goal seasons and is one of the last leaders standing on a roster that is getting younger by the trade.

Extension talks with GM Tom Fitzgerald are reportedly underway, and cap space is no issue in New Jersey. If the club cannot find common ground with a consistent forward who contributes to all situations, Palmieri will make a heckuva rental trade chip at the April deadline.

The Devils and Palmieri reportedly opened extension discussions in late September, but no deal is imminent.

9. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins
Age on July 28: 28

Position: Left wing / Centre
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$6 million

The latest: A friend of the rumour mill, Nugent-Hopkins enters his contract year hot off back-to-back 60-point campaigns. One of the few mainstays of the Oilers' top six, RNH has improved his two-way game and has the versatility to complement Edmonton's superstars from the wing or centre his own middle-six line when necessary.

Although Nuge cannot be replaced internally, until he is re-signed, speculation around the 2011 first-overall pick's future will linger. He does not hold trade protection.

Writes colleague Mark Spector: "I'd guess he'll be looking for Leon Draisaitl money (\$8.5 million), though the Oilers may think that's high. But with Connor McDavid (\$12.5 million) and Draisaitl (\$8.5 million) atop the salary structure, Nugent-Hopkins could be signed for a number that does not leave Edmonton like Toronto — top-heavy with three forwards averaging over \$11 million apiece."

Positive preliminary extension talks were reported to have taken place in October between the Oilers and Nugent-Hopkins' camp.

The best flat-cap comparable here may be Brendan Gallagher's six-year, \$22.5-million extension in Montreal.

10. Phillip Danault
Age on July 28: 28
Position: Centre
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$3.08 million

The latest: Danault's name was "out there" this off-season, per Elliotte Friedman, but trading responsible centremen before they hit age 30 is seldom advisable. Even if the future looks bright at the position (see: Nick Suzuki, Jasperi Kotkaniemi).

Danault doesn't exactly put up Xbox numbers — he's never surpassed 13 goals and has reached 50 points just once — but he tilts the ice, nullifies the opposition's top centre regularly and is a plus-35 player over the past two seasons.

Yes, GM Marc Bergevin was quick to commit to Petry and Gallagher, but his decisions on 2021 UFAs don't end there.

"At this moment, there are no negotiations," Danault said on Nov. 24. "Letting emotions get in the way of business doesn't really work. I understood that pretty quickly."

Yes, Danault wishes he'd been taken care of, the way Gallagher and Petry were, but he's still going to bring a winning attitude to the rink.

"I'll be at camp. The Canadiens gave me a three-year contract two years ago, and I still have a year to play with the Canadiens," Danault said. "After that, we'll see. I really have the intention of honouring my contract and then, after that, we'll see what the future holds."

11. Brandon Saad
Age on July 28: 28
Position: Left wing
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$6 million

The latest: Dealing Saad is the route Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman went (again) this off-season, with younger forwards



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coming up in the system (Dominik Kubalik, Dylan Strome) and Chicago embracing a reset.

Saad is a five-time 20-goal man who has enjoyed a solid career in Chicago's top six and is responsible on the defensive side of the puck. He's a consistent play-driver and should not be in line for a big pay chop just because he's now with the budget-conscious Avalanche.

Saad is riding into 2020-21 with a career-best 15 per cent shooting percentage and may have already peaked offensively, posing an intriguing call for Sakic.

The player told the NHL @ The Rink podcast that he's already falling in love with Denver and is excited about the prospect of playing with such a young, talented team.

12. David Krejci
Age on July 28: 35
Position: Centre
2020-21 salary cap hit: \$7.25 million

The latest: The highest-paid Bruin will have to take a pay cut, but Krejci's performance in the 2020 playoffs — a team-leading 12 points in 13 games — reasserted the value a dependable two-way pivot can bring.

Krejci is only a year removed from a 70-point performance, and unlike Boston's top-line players, he is seldom surrounded by elite offensive weapons. The legs are getting older, the contract needs to get shorter, but Krejci's hockey sense reminds us of the value in having a second-line centre you can trust in important situations.

"I'm not planning on retiring, that's for sure," Krejci said. "I plan on still playing. But for how long or what's going to happen after [this contract], I guess we'll see. I'm definitely not planning on going into [the 2021] season as my last."

Whether it will be his last with the Bruins could depend partly on the internal development of touted centre prospects Jack Studnicka and John Beecher.

More notable 2021 UFAs: Tyson Barrie, Eric Staal, Ryan Getzlaf, Tomas Tatar, Zach Hyman, Niklas Hjalmarsson, Adam Larsson, Derek Stepan, Paul Stastny, Philipp Grubauer, Alexander Edler, Petr Mrazek, Travis Zajac, Matt Niskanen, Jaden Schwartz, David Savard, Tyler Bozak, Ryan Murray, Nikita Gusev, Nick Foligno, Brandon Sutter, Nick Bonino, Alec Martinez, Adam Lowry, Blake Coleman, Sean Kuraly, Barclay Goodrow, Pekka Rinne, Jamie Oleksiak, Jordan Martinook, Tanner Pearson, Jordie Benn, Mikko Koivu



Hurricanes Top 25 Under 25, #2: Andrei Svechnikov

Carolina's teenage sensation is poised to take another step towards NHL stardom in 2021.

By Brett Finger

If 20 even-strength goals in his age-18 rookie season weren't enough to convince you that Andrei Svechnikov was on the path to NHL stardom, his sophomore season should have erased all doubt that he is well on his way to being one of the best players in the league.

Among all U21 players in the NHL last season, Svechnikov led the way in goals (24) and points (61). Among U21 forwards, he led in each primary offensive statistic. His game grew by leaps and bounds over his rookie year, and there were many reasons for that.

Unlike most young players in the league, it had very little to do with him getting "bigger" or "stronger" or "faster." He's a special player in many ways, but among those ways is that he entered the league as a fully-built NHL forward from a physical and athletic perspective.

What changed from year one to year two is confidence. Rod Brind'Amour has talked about it often, and he's right when he says that Svechnikov didn't know what he could and couldn't get away with as an 18-year-old. That's not a knock against him; it's just a fact of life for any young star breaking into the NHL.

It took almost no time for Svechnikov to start making dynamic, game-changing plays as a second-year player that he didn't

feel comfortable doing as a rookie. His playmaking ability reached an entirely different level from the outset of the season as he compiled several gorgeous primary assists in the opening two weeks of the season, and the Hurricanes got off to a team-record 5-0-0 start.

From start to finish, it wasn't a steady stream of big numbers, though. There were games where he didn't pop off with big offensive moments, but it was a tangible improvement from his rookie year, and that's exactly what you want to see out of a player like him in the early stages of his career - progression.

Then, of course, Oct. 29, 2019 happened.

Down 1-0 against the Calgary Flames at PNC Arena, the Hurricanes had no answer for David Rittich, whose goaltending had carried the Flames through the first two. But with 10:47 left in the third period, Svechnikov officially arrived on the NHL landscape.

Everyone remembers that goal, but what he did just over three minutes later deserves its own praise. With 7:25 to go in that game, he fired a perfect snapshot under the glove of Rittich to give the Hurricanes a 2-1 lead that held up through the remainder of the game.

Late in a one-goal game, he took control and dictated the game's result by turning a destined hard-fought, one-goal loss into a rousing home-ice win to close out the opening month of the season.

That's what superstars do.



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As a 19-year-old, Svechnikov flirted with a point-per-game season, finishing with 24 goals and 61 points in 68 games played. His role on the team blossomed as he saw his average ice time jump from 14:39 as a rookie to 16:44 in year two. He enjoyed a new place in the lineup, as well.

It was well-documented that the Canes coaching staff had a tight leash on him as a rookie. He skated with Lucas Wallmark and Jordan Martinook on the team's third line for most of the year, and he was a non-factor on the power play.

That changed last season as he was deployed as a true top-six player. His most frequent deployment was on a line with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen, a trio that rendered 21 goals for to just 13 goals against. That line ranked fifth among all NHL lines with north of 200 5-on-5 minutes, producing 4.82 goals-for per 60.

He was bumped up to top power-play unit duties last year, as well. In that role, he racked off 6 goals and 20 points on the man advantage after failing to record a single power-play goal as a rookie. The only Hurricane with more power-play production was Teravainen (21 power-play points).

As impressive as his offensive production was, though, that wasn't the only area where he experienced massive growth.

He trailed only Teravainen among Carolina forwards in corsi share, finishing the shortened season with a 57.04% corsi-for rate. He also finished second among Canes forwards with 56.77% expected goals-for and 57.3% scoring chances-for rates.

His heat map echoes his development in those areas.

It helps that he got ice time with better players, but he took a significant step forward in limiting chances against while maintaining an excellent rate of producing chances for his team.

Canes prospects make splash at WJC

The Carolina Hurricanes were represented by four prospects on the World Juniors stage: Ryan Suzuki, Vasilii Ponomarev, Noel Gunler and Zion Nybeck.

By Ryan Henkel

The World Junior Championships commenced on Tuesday with the Americans taking home the gold over Canada in a 2-0 shutout. Ryan Suzuki was the only Canes' prospect to bring home hardware being a part of the silver medal Canadian squad.

In total, four prospects took part in the tournament representing three countries. 2019 first-round pick Ryan Suzuki for Team Canada, 2020 second-round pick Vasilii Ponomarev for Team Russia, and 2020 second-round and fourth-round picks, Noel Gunler and Zion Nybeck, for Team Sweden.

The tournament had a few big story lines throughout seeing Sweden's 54-game WJC preliminary winning streak fall at the hands of Russia and having Team Canada nearly pitch a perfect tournament by not conceding a single 5v5 goal until the Finals.

Year over year, Svechnikov improved in almost all aspects of his game and he did it all before turning 20.

His final act, then as a 20-year-old player in the play-in round and first round of the playoffs, was a resounding statement that his best is still to come.

En route to logging seven points in six postseason games inside the bubble, he became the first player in franchise history to score a playoff hat trick and the eighth-youngest player in NHL history to do so.

That all brings us to today. As the Hurricanes prepare for another season with rising expectations, Svechnikov will be at the center of everything they do. So what's next for him, you might ask?

"I want to improve everywhere, especially to be a leader of the team, to be one of them," Svechnikov said after day three of training camp on Wednesday. "To be a better player and help win those games for the team. I think that's what's most important."

Fresh off of being honored as the team's Steve Chiasson Award winner, which was voted on by his teammates and is given annually to the Canes player that best exemplifies determination and dedication through his performance and approach to the game, his focus is to become an even bigger part of the leadership core of the team.

There is a lot to be excited about regarding his future, but perhaps his most impressive trait is his character. That's why, among many other things, Brind'Amour believes that he will keep getting better and better.

"His willingness to get better is why he is going to keep getting better."

For the Canes though, one of the most impressive outings was that of Gunler. Although his team didn't get past the first round of the elimination bracket, his four goals in Sweden's five games were impressive. Gunler has always been touted for his shot, and the World Juniors gave him a bit of time to display that skill.

Unfortunately, Team Sweden would lose in the first elimination round to Team Finland, so Gunler wouldn't get much more time to showcase his shot.

Another standout for the tournament was Ponomarev. Not only did he pick up three goals during the tournament, but he also did it while playing on Russia's fourth line. Even then, he was always noticeable on the ice, hounding the puck and making plays with his limited time.

After a big loss to Canada in the semi-finals and then the loss in the bronze medal match to Finland, Russia will look to regroup for next year and one of Team Russia's relied upon staples should be Ponomarev who should get an elevated role and time.

Another player who should see an elevated role next year is Zion Nybeck. Nybeck had only a lone assist in Sweden's five



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games, but he was only getting fourth line minutes. Nybeck is also a player on the smaller end, so it will be interesting to see how he looks next year.

The final prospect at the WJC was the only one to come away with any hardware. Suzuki was one of the 20 first-round picks representing Team Canada and he put up a fair stat line of two goals and four points in seven games.

While it was unfortunate, Kirby Dach's injury did make room for Suzuki to have a more stable role with the team. He was projected to be the 13th forward on the roster, but Dach's absence allowed Suzuki to get steady time on the fourth line and second power play unit.

While none of the Hurricanes' prospects were tournament standouts, the higher rated ones all made substantial impacts with their teams. Gunler showed off his elite shooting skills that will hopefully transition well to the NHL, Suzuki played dependable hockey down the stretch and Ponomarev showcased his relentless engine, positioning and stick work.

While Nybeck wasn't too exciting at the tournament, there is the chance for next year's tournament to be a more promising event for him. Along with him, Canes fans should also expect to see Ponomarev to return as well as Seth Jarvis to make Team Canada and potentially Alexander Pashin for Team Russia.

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1198140 Carolina Hurricanes

From broadcasters to how to watch, here's what you should know about Hurricanes games

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Fox Sports Carolinas will televise 54 of the Carolina Hurricanes' 56 games in the 2020-21 regular season, it was announced Thursday.

The games will be broadcast in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia through cable, satellite and over-the-top providers, including AT&T U-verse, AT&T TV, DirecTV and Spectrum.

Mike Maniscalco will serve as the play-by-play announcer after spending four seasons as in-game reporter and host of Hurricanes LIVE. Maniscalco was the play-by-play announcer in the Canes' 2020 Return to Play postseason.

Tripp Tracy returns for his 22nd season as game analyst and former Hurricanes player Shane Willis will return for his eighth season as Hurricanes LIVE analyst

Abby Labar has been promoted to the host of Hurricanes LIVE and will also serve as in-game reporter. Before joining the FOX Sports Carolina's telecast, Labar spent four seasons as the Hurricanes' in-arena host and reporter.

News Observer LOADED: 01.08.2021

1198141 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes, Predators to share AHL affiliation with Chicago Wolves this season

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

The coronavirus pandemic has brought about some strange bedfellows in sports, and here's another one:



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The Carolina Hurricanes and Nashville Predators, both members of the NHL's new Discover Central Division, will jointly have an American Hockey League affiliation with the Chicago Wolves.

Don Waddell, the Canes president and general manager, announced the agreement Thursday. The Predators will be able to loan players to the Wolves in the 2020-21 AHL season.

"This season presents a unique situation, with NHL teams having taxi squads and some AHL teams opting out," Waddell said in a statement. "We were able to come to an agreement with the Predators and Wolves that we believe benefits everyone involved. The Wolves have been great partners and we're thankful for their willingness to work out this agreement."

Making the arrangement more intriguing is that the Canes and Predators will play each other eight times this season. It's likely a Canes player will be recalled from the Wolves, play against a Wolves teammate in an NHL game with the Preds, and then both return to be AHL teammates again in Chicago.

NHL teams will be allowed taxi squads this season with four to six players, but it's possible a teammate-to-foe situation will arise.

The Canes ended their long AHL affiliation with the Charlotte Checkers and signed a three-year deal with Chicago in September 2020. The Checkers have opted out of the 2020-21 season because of COVID-19 concerns as have the Milwaukee Admirals, the Predators' AHL affiliate.

The current Wolves coaching staff, including head coach Ryan Warsofsky, will handle coaching duties, the Canes said.

News Observer LOADED: 01.08.2021

1198142 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes camp observations: Should Carolina trade for a PP sniper?

By Sara Civian Jan 7, 2021

Remember that time I told you you're allowed to care about training camp this year?

I still urge you to do so, but a source very close to the situation is asking us to at least leave the lines out of it.

"As far as the lines, you guys know," Rod Brind'Amour said Tuesday. "I laugh when I read about these other places talking about lineup combinations, everybody's freaking out about things. There's probably no chance that the lines I laid out now are how they're gonna be. I mean, I doubt it, and if it happens. We haven't even really talked about how our lines are going to shake out Day 1 because we want to get a bunch of looks, so don't read into that too much."

So yeah, don't freak out that Andrei Svechnikov is flirting with the second line or whatever else you're freaking out about. But you can care a little, I promise. If nothing else, these early camp lines show us what kinds of "looks" the Canes coaching staff are trying to get, and that gives us a little look behind the curtain.

Caring an appropriate amount about the lines

The Hurricanes have rolled out the same line combinations through the first four days of training camp.

Nino Niederreiter-Sebastian Aho-Teuvo Teravainen

Andrei Svechnikov-Vincent Trocheck-Jesper Fast

Warren Foegele-Jordan Staal-Martin Necas

Ryan Dzingel-Jordan Martinook/Morgan Geekie-Brock McGinn

Jacob Slavin-Doug Hamilton

Brady Skjei-Brett Pesce

Jake Gardiner-Haydn Fleury

Again, Brind'Amour said there's "probably no chance" the opening night lines are as they appear, but he also said he's trying to see a few things. Niederreiter's first-line status immediately comes to mind — left-wing depth is one of the most confusing aspects for the Canes right now. They know what they have in Svechnikov, but could Niederreiter get some of that 2018-19 magic back in a first-line situation? Or could Dzingel force himself off of the fourth line?

The Jesper Fast and Martin Necas placements are sort of the same thing — I'd guess the Canes have an original hypothesis that Fast will serve as Williams' replacement on the Jordan Staal line, and they know they can default to that. So why not see what else the new guy can do?

Power Play 1:

Aho, Teravainen, Svechnikov, Trocheck, Hamilton

Power Play 2:

Dzingel, Staal, Niederreiter, Necas, Gardiner

No offense to anyone currently on the second power-play unit, but I will say my first reaction when I saw it was "I finally understand the Patrik Laine rumors." Do I think the Hurricanes should trade Pesce (and a package of other things) for Laine? Absolutely not. Do I think a sniper needs to emerge, somehow? Yes.

I very well think it could be Necas, and he did have five power-play goals in very limited time last season. But I also think if he's going to be that second power-play sniper then the Canes need to express that to him.

Taxi squad chronicles

It has been refreshing covering Brind'Amour as a coach, because he's confident enough to admit when he doesn't know something. We're all trying to wrap our heads around the idea of the taxi squad this season, Brind'Amour included.

"We have beat this around a lot already and nobody really has a for sure way to do it because of the uncertainty of everything," he said, when I asked him if the Hurricanes' strategy will favor NHL experience or prospect potential. "Normally you'd say 'We're not going to have five injuries,' but with COVID going on you don't know if five guys get taken out, right? So you gotta have five guys ready, then you don't want your top prospects not playing. So is it better to have them down, playing in the AHL, getting better? What do you think?"

I can say with 100 percent certainty that there isn't a taxi squad thought that has crossed my mind that Brind'Amour hasn't already thought about. But I'd bet we're on the same page about the best course of action: Heavy on the veterans, but give Bean or at least one promising prospect teetering the NHL line a chance. The NHL team you put on the ice is obviously of utmost importance, and at the end of the day the main priority is strategically stacking the taxi squad with the most competency as possible.

But, it might be a good idea to ask some of the top prospects what they actually want to do for once. As detailed in the linked post, being on the taxi squad comes with certain limitations — not necessarily playing, not being paid an NHL salary and who knows about housing? Still, it's a chance at the NHL and such a unique situation.

I'd never act like I've thought of something innovative, but Brind'Amour did ask me what I think. So on top of everything else I'm sure he's already thought of, I'd consider asking some of the top prospects what they actually want to do.



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"I think everyone's going to be (consulting each other) on everything this season," Brind'Amour said. "It's not just the taxi squad. I've had quite a few conversations with college hockey coaches this season about what they were experiencing. They've been playing, and they've all been shut down at times. So what are the real hurdles? I think everybody is trying to get information from everybody, and I don't think anyone has the great answer. But I think it's good to inform yourself on what everyone's trying to do. We're all still in that great unknown, and it is what it is, but everyone is trying to be prepared."

Smart people use their resources.

Speaking of the AHL ...

The Hurricanes and the Predators will share an affiliation with the Chicago Wolves, the league announced Thursday.

"This season presents a unique situation, with NHL teams having taxi squads and some AHL teams opting out," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We were able to come to an agreement with the Predators and Wolves that we believe benefits everyone involved. The Wolves have been great partners and we're thankful for their willingness to work out this agreement."

Much like the helmet decals and the sponsored divisions, this is another thing I shrug at. Do what you have to do to play the season. The Predators' affiliate, the Milwaukee Admirals, were one of three teams at opted out of the AHL season this year.

I will say I immediately thought of Predators prospect and Raleigh Native Josh Wilkins. Maybe this breach of the space-time continuum will make him a Hurricane.

Brett and Brian Pesce are back

Two equally important things to announce, here: Brett Pesce is back to himself, feeling 100 percent after inevitable shoulder surgery sidelined him for the playoffs. And his dad is back on Twitter.

"People, I think, take Pesh for granted about how good he is," Martinook said Wednesday. "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 ... He's always smiling when he comes to the rink. 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."

This is why I say "screw the second power play unit, don't trade Pesce for Laine."

But we'll see what the next four days entail.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.08.2021

1198246 Websites

The Athletic / 2020-21 NHL best bets: Which teams to put your money on

By Harman Dayal

Jan 7, 2021

Ahead of each of the past three seasons, The Athletic's Dom Luszczyzyn has published an article with recommendations for betting on teams' point totals based on the same model he uses for projections for our season preview series — and he has done so to the tune of a 14-

4 record over the first two seasons and almost equally impressive results in 2019-20 (more on that later).

Dom's currently exhausted from doing all those season previews in a condensed timeline for the 2020-21 season, so he's taking a little break to contemplate what Tesla to buy with his cryptocurrency gains. But with more and more sports fanatics turning to the betting industry to try to make some extra coin, the picks must go on. I'll be taking over to present his model's top bets. That means you should remember to thank (or blame) Dom at the end of the season for these picks and not me. I'm just the messenger.

The way it works is simple: Before the season, oddsmakers set lines on how many points each team will earn and which teams will make the playoffs, and you can lay a bet whether a team will go over or under the point total or on a team to make the playoffs or not. If you're right, you make money.

Before we get to this year's best bets, let's begin with a closer look at how Dom's picks performed the past three seasons:

2017-18: 8-2 (and 4-0 on honorable mentions)

2018-19: 6-2 (and 0-3 on honorable mentions)

2019-20: The 2019-20 regular season wasn't fully completed, but we were close enough to the finish line to know which of the model's suggested bets were likely to pay off. (Actual playoff odds based on a team's odds of making it when the season paused.)

Would've likely hit

Minnesota Wild to go OVER 87.5 points. Actual pace: 92 points.

Carolina Hurricanes OVER 95.5. Actual pace: 98.

St. Louis Blues OVER 96.5. Actual pace: 109.

Columbus Blue Jackets OVER 83.5. Actual pace: 95.

Carolina Hurricanes YES to make the playoffs (-140). Actual odds: 80 percent.

Arizona Coyotes NO (+115). Actual odds: 15 percent.

New York Rangers NO (-125). Actual odds: 18 percent.

Buffalo Sabres NO (-210). Actual odds: 0 percent.

St. Louis Blues YES (-260). Actual odds: 100 percent.

Tampa Bay Lightning YES (-400). Actual: 100 percent.

Toronto Maple Leafs YES (-325). Actual odds: 86 percent.

Pittsburgh Penguins YES (-205). Actual odds: 99 percent.

Would've likely missed

Anaheim Ducks OVER 81.5. Actual pace: 77.

New York Rangers UNDER 88.5. Actual point pace: 93.

Anaheim Ducks YES (+220). Actual odds: 0 percent.

Colorado Avalanche NO (+240). Actual odds: 100 percent.

Edmonton Oilers NO (-190). Actual odds: 94 percent.

Too close to call

Los Angeles Kings OVER 74.5. Actual point pace: 75.

Minnesota Wild YES (+145). Actual odds: 47 percent.

Florida Panthers NO (+200). Actual odds: 33 percent.

Winnipeg Jets NO (+200). Actual odds: 44 percent.

Nashville Predators YES (-205). Actual odds: 68 percent.



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There's obviously no exact way to determine what each team's final record would have been or if any would have unexpectedly risen into or fallen out of the playoffs with a late surge or slump. But 12-5 with five tossups is the snapshot just before the March shutdown. Not bad at all.

So now what about this season? Let's dive into where Dom's model says to put the money, sorted by the confidence in each bet.

Odds are from Bet Online as of Jan. 6 and are subject to change.

Point Totals

Detroit Red Wings OVER 41.5

This one may come off as a head-scratcher, but hear me out. Detroit's still tied with Ottawa for the highest odds of finishing 31st, but the line seems a bit too harsh on the exact point total after a historically awful season. The model pegs them at a tick below 50 points, including a 72 percent chance of hitting 45 points — a mark that would comfortably clear the 41.5 line.

It's remarkably easy to improve your roster when you're at rock bottom, and that's exactly what the Red Wings have done this offseason, mostly through addition by subtraction. Detroit gained 4.6 wins of value by shedding below-replacement-level names like Jimmy Howard, Justin Abdelkader and Trevor Daley while also receiving a modest boost from the signings of Thomas Greiss, Vladislav Namestnikov, Troy Stecher and Bobby Ryan.

Combined, this quietly helped move the needle by six wins of value, which doesn't seem to have been taken into account in the line.

Pittsburgh Penguins OVER 64.5

Pittsburgh suffered a demoralizing wild-card round loss to the Montreal Canadiens in the bubble, but it feels like the oddsmakers are overreacting to that loss.

The betting market has the Penguins ranked fifth in the East division. That's low even when considering how strong the competition is. Pittsburgh's top-six forward group remains one of the most potent in the league and there are no signs that Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby will be slowing down anytime soon after the monster production rates they managed last year. There's going to be a sense of urgency for this team to prove that the window hasn't closed, and when one examines the talent level at the top end of their lineup at every position — up front, in the top four on defence and in goal — it will have the firepower to continue running hot so long as it can stay healthy.

San Jose Sharks UNDER 55.5

The Sharks aren't going anywhere until they figure out their goaltending situation. That already won't be easy given the chaotic situation on defence that comes with leaning on Brent Burns and Erik Karlsson at this stage in their respective careers, but hoping that Devan Dubnyk — projected as the league's worst goalie — can provide the answer between the pipes isn't a recipe for success. Goal prevention is going to be a serious issue for this team, and with the core aging another year, it's hard to see even a modest bounce-back.

New York Islanders UNDER 64.5

It'll be the year 2065 and Dom will still be betting the under on the Islanders. (I kid, I kid.) In all seriousness, the Islanders will obviously still challenge for the playoff spot; it's just that the projections aren't as certain on their chances as the betting market is. Barry Trotz's troops slumped for most of the season after a hot start, and it genuinely looked like their playoff spot was at risk. The team unquestionably made up for it with their bubble playoff run, but the roster is getting up there in age and lost Devon Toews, one of its most pivotal defencemen last year.

Toronto Maple Leafs OVER 68.5

I can hear the criticism in the comments section coming already, but the Leafs really benefit from the weakness of the Canadian division here. They're projected to be six points better than the Calgary-Edmonton-

Montreal tier in this 56-game format, and you can understand why. They've retained their explosive top end, added a defenceman in TJ Brodie who should be a much better fit than Tyson Barrie and are deep at every position. They've also tinkered around the edges in adding toughness and should be motivated to come back strong after a wildly disappointing season.

Ottawa Senators OVER 46.5

The case for betting the over on Ottawa is the same as Detroit: They're bad, but not as bad as the line suggests they will be. Ottawa's blue line is a train wreck, but it has some intriguing pieces up front and should be competitive in more games than anticipated. The model thinks the Senators are closer to a 49.5-point club.

Vancouver Canucks UNDER 64.5

The Canucks are looked at as a coinflip to make the playoffs, so the projections aren't totally writing them off, but it feels like the line is a tad higher at 64.5 than it should be following an offseason in which they lost their starting goaltender and two top-nine forwards. Vancouver's core is elite and is going to be a force, but one wonders if the roster is deep enough to live up to the hype after a dream 2019-20 campaign.

Florida Panthers UNDER 63.5

The Panthers made some tidy moves this offseason with compelling low-risk gambles, but it's tough to overcome the loss of two bona fide top-six forwards in Mike Hoffman and Evgenii Dadonov. Aleksander Barkov, Aaron Ekblad and Jonathan Huberdeau should lift this team, and the team's depth isn't bad, but they lack enough high-end difference-makers outside of that trio, and the result is a projection that lands 2.5 points lower than the betting line.

New Jersey Devils OVER 53.5

This one's risky because the line difference isn't large and the Devils are the worst team in their division, but they have made incremental upgrades, adding nearly five wins of value in the offseason. Corey Crawford should form a solid tandem with the emerging MacKenzie Blackwood, and the team added some nice secondary contributors in Ryan Murray and Andreas Johnsson.

Playoff Chances

Underhyped

Teams not getting enough credit going into the season.

Pittsburgh Penguins YES to make the playoffs (-155).

St. Louis Blues YES (-260).

Montreal Canadiens YES (-210).

Edmonton Oilers YES (-150).

Pittsburgh and St. Louis are in a similar boat in that the recency bias of an early playoff exit means their line isn't as chalky as it probably should be. The Penguins' odds of making the playoffs, converting the -155 line to a percentage, are only 60 percent while the model is a lot more bullish in the 80 percent range. St. Louis' line is also likely dragged down by the loss of Alex Pietrangolo and injury to Vladimir Tarasenko, but it can't be forgotten that the Blues were second in the NHL when the 2019-20 regular season ended, replaced Pietrangolo with Torey Krug and look like they'll be signing Hoffman to replace Tarasenko.

Montreal and Edmonton clock in with much slimmer margins, but the projection is modestly higher than the line on each team's chances in the Canadian division.

Overhyped

Teams getting too much credit going into the season.

New York Islanders NO (+110).



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Vancouver Canucks NO (+120).

As we mentioned before, the model doesn't hate the Islanders or Canucks. But these lines just put a bit too much faith in them.

Conservative Lines

Lines that oversell the uncertainty of an NHL season.

Boston Bruins YES (-250).

Colorado Avalanche YES (-500).

Chicago Blackhawks NO (-450).

Buffalo Sabres NO (-240).

Toronto Maple Leafs YES (-400).

Los Angeles Kings NO (-400).

Tampa Bay Lightning YES (-500).

Carolina Hurricanes YES (-250).

Ottawa Senators NO (-500).

Anaheim Ducks NO (-210).

Vegas Golden Knights YES (-450).

New Jersey Devils NO (-325).

Philadelphia Flyers YES (-165).

It's been a trend for the betting market to overestimate the uncertainty of the NHL season, and this season is no different. Compressing from 82 to 56 games doesn't work in certainty's favour, and while it may seem like there is already a decent amount of chalk on them, they probably aren't chalky enough. For instance, -500 lines for Colorado and Tampa Bay translates to an 83 percent chance, and -250 for Boston to 71 percent. The actual playoff odds for those teams, per the model, are in the 88 to 95 percent range.

That means the juice is still worth the squeeze for these odds that overcompensate for the randomness of the season. Probably.

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The Athletic / The hockey expert group text: A GM and four coaches watch the world junior final

By Scott Wheeler

Jan 7, 2021

EDMONTON — The first version of this piece was born inside the NHL's Stanley Cup playoffs five months ago as I tried to find creative ways to cover the bubble.

The goal was this: Ask a handful of people who watch the sport from different perspectives to join a group text for a game, introduce them, and leave them to discuss the game and its players and pick each other's brains in real time.

Then publish the entire chat log.

I knew, at the time, that the execution wasn't as simple as the idea. That's because they each needed to be available, they all had to be

candid for it to work, and everyone would have to understand that everything was on the record.

When it worked, I knew that I had to do it again. But I also knew that it had to remain a novelty. So I circled the 2021 gold-medal game at the world juniors as my next target.

What followed felt like the perfect evolution of the first iteration of this exercise.

Here's the group that joined me:

•Soo Greyhounds general manager Kyle Raftis. Raftis played five seasons in the OHL as a defencemen, including one as captain of the Peterborough Petes. He was hired as the OHL's director of recruiting, education and player development at the age of 25 in 2011 and replaced Kyle Dubas as general manager in Sault Ste. Marie three years later. Since, his Greyhounds have developed top NHL prospects Morgan Frost, Conor Timmins, Zach Senyshyn, Barrett Hayton, Rasmus Sandin, and Ryan O'Rourke, among others.

•Skills coach Josh Wrobel. Wrobel is a Toronto-based shooting specialist who works with several NHL players and many of the game's best young prospects, including Shane Wright, Jack Quinn, Luke Evangelista and Brandt and Graeme Clarke.

•Development coach Pat Malloy. Malloy is a longtime junior hockey head coach, general manager and skills coach who has worked for the QMJHL's Gatineau Olympiques and the Jr. A Ottawa Jr. Senators, Kemptville 73s, Pembroke Lumber Kings, and now Smith Falls Bears. He has also worked as an NHL development coach for the Sabres and Senators. His offseason clients include Claude Giroux and Erik Karlsson.

•Goaltending coach Michael Lawrence. Lawrence has served as a goalie coach for the OHL's Oshawa Generals, Sudbury Wolves, and Owen Sound Attack, the KHL's Sibir Novosibirsk, and the ECHL's Las Vegas Wranglers. He's currently the goalie coach for HC Lugano in the NL, Switzerland's top pro league. He's also the head instructor at Pro Goaltending, who's worked with NHL goalies like Elvis Merzlikins and Malcolm Subban. Lawrence won back-to-back Spengler Cups as Team Canada's video coach in 2016 and 2017, and has worked with Hockey Canada's world junior program through its summer evaluation camp.

•Strength and conditioning coach Dante Martella. Martella works alongside renowned strength coach Matt Nichol. He's the guy who players like Tyler Seguin, Darnell Nurse, Tom Wilson, and Jordan Binnington — among many others — turn to each summer for their training or rehab. Martella was one of the five experts who participated in this exercise the first time around, but he's also a childhood friend of mine so I didn't feel guilty asking him again.

Note: The conversation that follows has been lightly edited for spelling, clarity and concision — and to add game-specific details and videos whenever it discussed a play or player.

Scott Wheeler: The bronze-medal game media avails have just wrapped up, I'm back at my seat, warmups are underway below me, and it's go time. Thanks to each of you for doing this (especially to Michael Lawrence, who had to set an alarm to wake up for the 3:30 a.m. start time in Switzerland!).

Dante Martella: Great to meet you all! Thanks for hosting, Wheels.

Josh Wrobel: Thanks Scott! Buckled in, let's do this.

Pat Malloy: Hi lads, ready to roll.

Lawrence: Morning, everyone!

Martella: Love a 3:30 a.m. wake-up call for hockey!

Kyle Raftis: Hey guys, excited to talk some hockey. Did you sleep or stay up, Mike?

Lawrence: Few hours of sleep, we played at home last night so a good three hours!



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Warmups finish.

Wheeler: I've got to submit my media all-star and MVP ballot by the end of the first intermission. Anything leap out as heinous to any of you with the following: F: Trevor Zegras, Dylan Cozens, Tim Stuetzle. D: Bowen Byram, Ville Heinola. G: Devon Levi. MVP: Trevor Zegras.

Malloy: Looks spot on for me.

Wrobel: I agree, Scott. Zegras with some heavy words pregame, see if he backs it up here. Absolutely loved getting more familiar with Stuetzle this tournament. Electric factory with a short bench, very impressive.

Martella: That Zegras is something else, man. I didn't realize just HOW good he is.

Raftis: Have to love Zegras' swagger.

Malloy: Can't see a Tourigny-coached team letting that shake them.

Wheeler: Zegras is a quote machine for my purposes. He'll be great for the game when he's in his prime. The creativity, the charisma, all of it.

Wrobel: For sure, nothing better than someone who talks a big game and backs it up.

Martella: Speaking of Tourigny, refreshing to hear his interviews. Last post-game interview he made a point of the roles played behind the scenes, that as damn near perfect as the players played, it was also the pre-scouting, the call on the review, the staff as a whole. Not often that they get their dues in this world. Was nice to see. Easy to see why players love playing for the guy.

Malloy: Don't be shocked when he's back in the NHL real soon.

Wheeler: It has also been traditionally way easier to pick the coaches apart on this stage than to praise them. When Canada fails, "they took the wrong guys, they played the wrong style, etc." When Canada wins, "they're supposed to win, look at all the first-round picks, etc."

Martella: Good point. Even the great Pat Quinn was criticized pre-tourney for not being able to coach "young guys" (a fabricated narrative). Gold looked great on him.

Wrobel: A nation of hockey experts on their couches (like us?).

Wheeler: One last thing I'm curious about before puck drop. Raftis: How'd (Greyhounds defenceman and Minnesota Wild prospect) Ryan O'Rourke handle the Team Canada cut? Sounded like he was really close and it must sting to have had most of the camp taken away due to the COVID cases that popped up.

Raftis: He is usually very hard on himself and a good self evaluator (which is rare at this age), he thought he was close. So wasn't thrilled about being cut. Like in this case, this is the first time a lot of these guys don't end up making a team in their entire life.

Puck drop.

Malloy: Dylan Cozens is just so hard on pucks. Going to serve him well at the next level. Reminds me of Mark Stone with his timing and the way he steals pucks.

Wrobel: Absolute horse. Big body and he knows how to use it.

Martella: Guess we'll see where the chips fall tonight, but where does this Team Canada stack up for you guys against some of the better ones over the years?

Malloy: Depth, role acceptance and execution off the charts.

Wrobel: The buy-in from every player no matter what role they've been asked to play stands out to me. It's a lot to ask guys who are used to top-six minutes on their respective teams.

Lawrence: Goaltending wise, we have not seen a performance like this since Justin Pogge.

Martella: I went down a rabbit hole the other day after hearing the Pogge comparison, looking at goalies throughout the history of the tourney. Wild to see some spectacularly dominant performances from goalies that often don't translate at the next level. Think it speaks to the challenge of consistency and adversity long term — and the emotion of the two-week tourney itself. That said, (Devon) Levi has all the makings of a kid you want to root for. You can almost see the whole story in his smile. Humble, happy to be there, but intensely competitive and passionate. Great qualities that'll serve him well no matter where he goes.

Wrobel: Love Levi's story. Has had to grind to get here, much like (Jack) Quinn. Uphill battle their whole careers to this point.

Wheeler: Anything in particular about Levi jump out at you, Michael?

Lawrence: I've been fortunate enough to see him play since his minor hockey days in Lac St. Louis. What sticks out is his mental game. It's a chess game to him. (Martin) Brodeur had that in his career. Some goalies need to work to be in the game. He has such good focus that he can do both light workloads and heavier. Many pros falter with light loads. Brodeur was excellent at that. He could see 12-20 shots regularly and make few mistakes. That makes him special.

Regarding his style, I think the best thing I see is how well he holds perimeter feet, which means narrow feet in stance. Visually, it allows a goalie to look bigger than he actually is. His knock is he is only 6-foot, however visually on the puck he's more in the ball park of a 6-foot-2 guy. Holding your feet takes incredible patience.

Malloy: Saw him tons last year on a stacked team. Just so steady, consistent, never a bad night, knows how to play on a good team.

Raftis: Levi has been great, more pressure on him than anyone coming in based on the "super team" status. Will be interesting to see if the U.S. add more deception on their attack. Throughout the tournament, Canada had been so diligent about being above the puck that Levi gets to read straight line attacks, sets up early with as much depth as he wants, then gets time to find any loose change and smooth movements have taken care of the rest.

Wheeler: From a strength perspective, anything different about training a goalie versus a player, Dante?

Martella: We always focus on the athlete first, rather than the sport or position, but those are definitely part of the equation. Mobility/flexibility would be the obvious qualities requiring attention but with that comes the necessity of building stability and strength at those more extreme ranges of motion. Core control/hip stability are paramount no matter the position, but maybe more so for goaltenders. And then when it comes to conditioning and specificity, we do some interesting things like having our goalies play squash/doing gymnastics as part of their training.

Overall, they're not lifting as heavy as often, with more of a focus on stability/control, elasticity and reactivity.

Malloy: U.S. skating really well tonight.

Wrobel: Do we have a counter on D shots getting blocked? Can't stand it.

Wheeler: The Russians really struggled with that. So much of it came down to an insistence on working below the goal line and feeding the point. No options in the slot because they're trying so hard to play the cycle (with no release) and then teams just started fronting the point shots and the Russians couldn't generate.

Alex Turcotte scores.

Wrobel: My favorite stat for my D is SOG. I don't care how hard it is just get it on net and create action. Perfect example right there on that goal. Changed the angle to find the lane, throw one at the net even if it's not a rocket.

Martella: Well, we've got a game early. Let's see how they respond to some adversity. The Americans are buzzing here.



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Malloy: U.S. owning entries in possession, offensive-zone loose puck recoveries, the game of races.

Lawrence: I really like the response factor from Levi as well. They have led most tournament, hopefully that calm demeanour stays in check.

Martella: Bingo. They've been largely cruising their way through the whole tournament. Well earned, but marching steadily. Big moment to be able to weather the storm a bit. Bend but don't break!

Raftis: Need disrupters here, guys that can change momentum back after things weren't clicking.

Martella: I look to a guy like (Alex) Newhook. Skilled as he is, he finishes checks and plays so hard.

Malloy: Interested to see if all the touches Canada just had builds some momentum.

Wrobel: Touches are huge, get these guys some rhythm

Lawrence: (U.S. goalie Spencer) Knight is so skilled, guys. This is more than just a gold-medal game for Knight. This is a statement for him in the Florida organization. And from an NHL perspective, we are going to see more and more goaltending talent coming from Florida. Their goaltending department is in good hands with Leo Luongo working with the kids. Smart organizations will follow suit soon enough. The Islanders and the Devils also have new departments.

Malloy: Love the growth mindset of a department like that within a team.

Wheeler: The contrast between Knight and (Russian goalie Yaroslav) Askarov seems so striking. The two "top" goalie prospects in the world. One stops pucks like they're coming at him in slow motion, the other is jittery and bouncing around in the net. Both work in their own way.

Wrobel: Jittery goalies make me nervous. I want my goalie looking like he's got a cup of coffee in his hands.

Martella: Think it's easy to forget sometimes how young these guys are. So much development ahead. Tough to see Askarov the other night, but was cool to see him stand on the ice alone to watch Finland celebrate bronze. Clearly he cares. I firmly believe that exposing oneself to those moments of adversity in different ways and at different levels can help build/train the ability to persevere as a whole. To be able to draw on that reservoir of "I can do this" and claw your way out one step at a time can only get "easier" the more you actually do it. Being comfortable with being uncomfortable so to speak.

I'd say the disappointments always provide the opportunity to learn/develop, just depends on how one uses it, should they choose to! My favorite quote on the topic:

Lawrence: Good point. Let's not forget Marc-Andre (Fleury) had tough lessons in this tournament as well. It worked out for the kid... how many Cups? Sometimes disappointments are your biggest curves. I had tough lessons while coaching in the CHL and my conclusion from the eight seasons was simple: In junior, 16-17 is light years, 17-18 light years, and so on. Don't be so quick to judge. Especially with a goalie, things eventually slow down in their minds and good things come from it.

Raftis: Very true. Not an easy tournament for an 18-year-old goalie. Knight looks a lot more comfortable this year after a year under his belt.

Wheeler: I imagine those tough moments can take a guy in two completely different directions. I remember Canada losing in the quarters in 2019 to Finland. Morgan Frost was outstanding on that team. From the Soo perspective, he had to come back and get back at it to pursue a playoff run. What do you do as an org to help a guy like Frost hit reset after that, Kyle?

Raftis: Regardless of the outcome, over the past few years I find the guys are emotionally exhausted. They need time to get back into the swing of the usual schedule. A lot of times we send them home with their families for a bit. Regular year as a 19-year-old this is the main goal. It's Canada-Russia series into a couple weeks of camp and into a tournament. Win

gold or don't, takes a toll. Plus, usually the team is playing without these guys for a month and when they come back everyone sits back and waits for them to do everything as they are the World Junior star. So if they aren't ready to be back, not pretty.

Wrobel: Really interesting, let them recharge a bit after such an emotional rollercoaster. I like that a lot.

Wrobel: Caufield so slippery, just sneaks into that soft spot.

First period ends.

Wheeler: Intermission Q for Pat and Josh: Been in touch with Quinn? Definitely one of those guys who's had to take on a bit of a different role here. Also his first Hockey Canada experience. Must be a lot.

Malloy: Just a little to say good luck, have fun with it all, stay in the moment and enjoy the ride.

Wrobel: Talked after last game about how his mindset has changed to embrace the role. Example: Coming through the neutral and getting it deep and forechecking as opposed to his role in Ottawa, where he would be looking to make a play, as we've seen him go 1-on-2 or 1-on-3 sometimes and take it to the net.

Second period starts.

Martella: Wow. What a bad bounce. I mean, that's gotta get out but... oof.

Lawrence: Oh wow...

Malloy: Was just writing Canada gotta get off the brakes and onto the gas, chasing the game. Be first, display some hard skill long enough to make a play.

Raftis: That building would be very quiet in a regular year.

Wheeler: The quiet has been so bizarre. Covered the NHL bubble in Toronto, too, but it feels more cavernous here with the extra bit of noise that comes with national pride.

Wrobel: Americans suffocating right now. Wow.

Malloy: Nothing clean from Canada, may take a bit of grease to get it going.

Wrobel: Good hit, get some jam in this game.

Martella: Americans so heavy down low right now. They've forced a handful of turnovers, even on a change while Canada waiting to breakout.

Raftis: Yes, especially along the half-wall.

Devon Levi drops his stick.

Lawrence: Don't give the goalie a stick!

Wrobel: How lost does a goalie feel without a stick? I'm assuming just having a player's stick helps just for feel at least?

Lawrence: Not at all... it's something we work on because, yes, it happens. What goes south is when a player can't do his job in front of you and take lanes. Always tell guys to KEEP your stick!

Martella: Interesting!

Malloy: Canada not playing well between checks, need to hit pockets in support on time, too much one-and-done.

Team Canada's Jakob Pelletier takes a hooking penalty.

Wrobel: American PP has looked lethal so far this tourney, will be interesting to see if they can snap it around against Canada's PK.

Wheeler: Doesn't hurt when Zegras gets to lift his head and pick between (Cole) Caufield and (Arthur) Kaliyev.



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Wrobel: So much chemistry between these guys who played at the program together.

Wheeler: For my own curiosity, I know Dante has trained him and Kyle has obviously watched him against the Soo, but Kaliyev seems like such a unicorn as a shooter. Don't think we've seen a shooting prospect like him since Patrik Laine, no? And any insight into how he releases the puck, Josh and Pat? That goal he scored last night was... something.

Martella: So many elements stood out to me on that play. The goal itself was sick. Unbelievable play. Puck in his feet, on its edge, suboptimal shooting position, and comes out with that immediate and heavy shot picking the corner. Wild. Maybe more impressive, your team blew a lead in the third period and this guy finds his way to the slot, confidently calls for the puck, and makes it count.

One knock on him is his skating, and he's pretty raw in the gym so there's good news in the sense that he can make some significant strides/gains there. But he certainly knows what he does well: Slapping the ice for that puck for a late game winner.

Wrobel: Unicorn is a great way to describe him. Don't notice him for a couple shifts and all of a sudden puck's on his stick and he capitalizes. Really good at finding soft spots and being available (extremely hard skill). Can have a great shot, but if you don't know how to get to certain spots, you can't use it. Pure shooter much like Laine. If he could round out some other parts of his game he could be really scary.

Raftis: Agree completely. The release is special but he does have the ability to get to the middle and off the wall as well. The IQ to find soft spots makes him especially dangerous.

Malloy: One of those guys that seems to create down pressure for power in his shooting posture, timing to score off the charts, reminds me of (Tyler) Toffoli from back in the day.

Lawrence: Good example of Levi holding his feet on the shot there. Slides over but gains his feet and holds. Made a great stop.

Wrobel: Absolutely love the play on the wall by 20 (Dawson Mercer). Pull up, draw the D and put a puck to an area.

Raftis: Canada settling in and starting to use the net to change sides in the o-zone and extend possessions.

Malloy: Need to create offensive support options, D jumping with how they skate could be deadly. Offensively, F2 being available and making quality first play to create some o-zone movements and stretch USA out a bit can start to turn things.

Second period ends.

Lawrence: Good Cole Perfetti story: We use to run all of our Pro Goaltending stakes out of UOIT in Oshawa. Cole's a local kid who would spend his summers shooting. His first day, a 15-year-old Cole shows up with a baby face in full force and walks into the staff room to get ready for the skate. I take one look and I ask my right-hand man Kevin Beech (a Lightning pick in his day) to see me outside. Kevin hires the shooters for the goalie school. I ripped Kevin and said "what's with the kid, he looks 11?"

Wrobel: That's a great story. Kid can shoot a puck. I've actually had Beech out to some of my summer skates before, great guy (hockey world is small right).

Wheeler: Ha! Love it. Raftis has seen his fair share of Cole in Soo vs. Saginaw games in the West Division, I'm sure.

Raftis: Definitely, very slick and the puck patience to wait out defenders to open lanes is always scary to see in defensive zone.

Wheeler: I know you've got two Spengler Cups with Canada, Michael. For readers who don't know, what's a dressing room like (for either team) in this scenario right now?

Lawrence: Being a part of Hockey Canada is special. The leadership which surrounds you from the support staff to the coaches is top-notch. Their experience simply takes over and for the guys who are feeling nerves, you can't help but feel confident. At the Spengler I remember being nervous on the gold medal day and legendary trainer Andy Huppi would come into the video room and say things like "why nervous, relax, guys have this" in his Swiss-German accent, aiming for a laugh. Little things like that are happening now for guys who have not been in these situations. It's truly a special group they assemble and everyone is key to providing that leadership. A season later, my growth the next year was very different in similar situations.

Martella: Great insight! Love it.

Third period starts.

Wrobel: Love the patience from McMichael there to not force it. Toss it to the point and get a shot.

Malloy: Seems like the wall play of the U.S. has really made a big difference, watch how they establish body position in battle sequences.

Martella: They close down on the house so well, too. When there's a second opportunity or loose puck in the slot and there are four white jerseys and one or two reds it's: easy recovery, short pass, puck's out of the zone.

Wheeler: This USA group isn't particularly big, either. USA averages per IIHF: 6-foot-0/183 pounds. Canada: 6-foot-1/197 pounds. Which would speak to battles won with lanes, positioning, approach, etc.

Raftis: How they leverage their bodies, speed, quickness, etc.

Malloy: Really is the power of establishing body position, such a key skill when graduating to the next level.

Lawrence: Great point. From a goaltending standpoint, you have to see visually over all of that mature positioning, too. Both goalies have been great tonight through traffic.

Martella: Americans playing pretty close to a perfect game, here. I'll say it: SHUTOUT!

Wheeler: Would be three shutouts for Knight if this holds. After he looked shaky in the opener against Russia at that, too.

Wrobel: Perimeter offence from Canada. Tough to beat Knight from outside.

Martella: Goes back full circle to what we started discussing. The Americans faced some adversity early in the tourney, pulled together and came through. Canada was just shell shocked a bit too long in the first 30 minutes of this game. Gotta catch lightning in a bottle here.

Malloy: Interesting to see how the Canadians are struggling to gain offensive zone entries in control, lots of straight lines to nowhere.

Wrobel: For sure, give me some east-west, try and open something up.

Martella: Why the hard rim there by 6 (Jamie Drysdale) instead of turning up ice for a breakout neutral zone pass? Guess they were changing, but seemed to feed it right into a bit of chaos. Bleeds time on the clock

Wheeler: Yeah, Jamie had all the time in the world there to use his feet.

Lawrence: Whistle comment: Bauer (my dog) is snoring pretty hard guys. Still very much a.m. here in Switzerland lol.

Martella: Haha my pooch Stanley is doing the same. Figures we'd have hockey-related names for the doggos.

Lawrence: Anyone else!?

Malloy: Cooper! Riding shotgun here in Ottawa.

Wrobel: I guess I'm left out of the hockey-related dog names. I went with Lola. Sorry to ruin the theme guys.



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Martella: Is Jordan Eberle doing anything right now? Asking for a friend...

Lawrence: Great gap on the puck there from Knight. He's so athletic. Florida has a lot to like moving forward. That save is a perfect example.

Martella: What a save.

Lawrence: What a play from 4 (Bowen Byram) on the blue line. No panic.

Martella: Through the legs! He's phenomenal.

Wrobel: That patience on the line from 4 will be huge at the next level.

Buzzer sounds, the Americans leap over the boards, throwing their sticks and gloves into the air.

Martella: Gotta hand it to 'em. Well deserved.

Wrobel: Perfect game from the States, suffocating from the start.

Malloy: The hard skill game in low percentage areas (walls) leading to success in high percentage areas (exits/entries/slot) was really a difference for the U.S. The real estate of the game.

Wheeler: It's funny, even without the fans, the scene is the same. Mayhem in one end. Heads down in the other.

Martella: What a unique twist having the captains hand out medals. Not sure if that would hurt or help emotionally in the moment, but good for Byram staying pretty level.

Lawrence: Not a bad add on moving forward. Like it. Very personal.

Wheeler: Byram held it together just long enough to give out the medals and then... let it all out. Man, the heartbreak.

Martella: Can appreciate the importance of taking time to acclimate guys back to their seasons/clubs after this like Kyle was speaking about earlier.

Lawrence: Absolutely...

Wrobel: Scott, thanks for putting this together, was a really cool way to watch a game and bounce thoughts around.

Malloy: Was great spending the night with you lads! Scott, thank you, was a really great experience!

Raftis: Thanks guys and Scott for putting it together!

Lawrence: Scott, thanks, was awesome chatting with you guys.

Martella: Thanks Wheels! Great chatting with you all.

Wheeler: Thank you to you guys! I said it the first time I did this exercise but I'll say it again: I know this was a bit of a weird ask so I appreciate the time and the candidness.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.08.2021

1198248 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why time is right for Maple Leafs to expand Matthews' defensive role

Chris Johnston@reporterchris

January 7, 2021, 3:01 PM

TORONTO -- After watching Auston Matthews become the NHL's most dangerous 5-on-5 goal-scorer, the Toronto Maple Leafs are committed to

creating new opportunities for him to expand his overall impact on the game.

That will include part-time penalty killing duties this upcoming season, head coach Sheldon Keefe revealed Thursday, which is a first for Matthews. To this point he's spent fewer than nine total minutes on the ice in short-handed situations throughout his entire NHL career.

Matthews took big defensive strides last season and was dominant in the faceoff dot, which is a key part of his new responsibility. Expect him to be sent out to win strong-side faceoffs so that the Leafs can get a defensive zone clear when down a man — at least initially — but don't rule out the possibility of his penalty-killing role eventually expanding into something bigger if injuries or performance necessitate it.

"I don't think you can put any sort of ceiling on a player like that because of his ability and his drive," said Keefe. "That's why we just continue to add layers to his responsibilities."

This is an evolution that started before Keefe stepped behind the Leafs bench.

Mike Babcock, his predecessor, said in October 2019 that he thought Matthews had "the chance to be the best two-way centre in hockey." That was before a season in which he produced an expected goals rate of 55.5 per cent — the best during his tenure with the Leafs.

Days before coronavirus paused the season in March, Leafs president Brendan Shanahan set the bar even higher by telling reporters that Matthews was "one of those rare players that has the ability to lead a league in scoring and also be its best defensive player."

"I mean there's very few guys that do that in hockey. I can remember [Sergei] Fedorov, in basketball Michael Jordan," added Shanahan. "That's putting him in some elite company, and I don't want to put that on him today. ... I think that Auston is dynamic and explosive offensively, but I think that he also has the ability with his size and his strength and his awareness, and his commitment, to be a Selke Trophy winner."

Matthews finished 16th last season in voting for the award that recognizes the forward who demonstrates the most skill in the defensive component of the game, earning one first-place vote and two fifth-place votes.

Being entrusted with penalty-killing duties will shine a brighter light on his defensive abilities.

Of course, the Leafs aren't making this move with any individual awards in mind — they're doing it out of necessity. Toronto tied for 24th in faceoff winning percentage while short-handed last season, which meant they spent a lot more time having to defend in their own zone at 4-on-5 than they felt necessary.

Zach Hyman stood in for 35 per cent of the team's total short-handed faceoffs and won just 43.1 per cent of them. The since-departed Frederik Gauthier was the only other player on the team to take more than 100 faceoffs in that game state and he was successful on 47 per cent of his attempts.

While Hyman and Mitch Marner will continue to be Toronto's primary penalty-killing forwards this year, followed by Alexander Kerfoot and Ilya Mikheyev on the second unit, there will be a specialist faceoff role carved out for Matthews (left) and Jason Spezza (right) depending which side of the ice a draw is on.

It's yet one more sign of the deep trust Keefe has in his best player. The fact Matthews received a healthy amount of offensive zone starts last season should not be confused with him being sheltered.

He was dominant on both sides of the puck during the five-game play-in series loss to Columbus in August. In fact, Keefe told Steve Simmons of the Toronto Sun that when he compiled clips of Leafs players properly establishing position away from the puck during that series, he had to remove a "bunch" featuring Matthews so that he included some variety.



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The 23-year-old felt he took a step during those games against Columbus.

"Not the result we wanted, but individually I felt really good in that series," said Matthews. "I thought there was definitely some positive things that I could take out of that and kind of move forward with that."

At six-foot-three and 220 pounds, he is a load for opposing players to handle.

While Matthews doesn't play in a way where he's looking to finish every check, he does use his body to establish position in dangerous offensive areas. And he doesn't back down when physically challenged by opponents.

He's rightfully earned a lot of attention since entering the NHL for the unique release on his deadly shot, which has propelled him to scoring 13 more goals than any other player across the last four seasons at 5-on-5.

But with the Leafs setting their sights on higher goals as a team, and with Matthews coming into his own entering his fifth NHL season, the next frontier is finding mastery in areas less likely to land him on the highlight reel.

"I know he's very committed to being great in all regards and we believe he has the tools to do that," said Keefe. "He's shown the ability and the willingness to put in the work. So, as I'm saying, we've got to continue to add layers to [his role] and give him opportunities to affect the game in more ways than just scoring goals."

Camp Notes

- Thursday morning was reserved for special teams meetings as players were given a chance to rest their bodies following three hard days of skating to open camp. A practice with an emphasis on the power play and penalty kill is scheduled for Friday.

- The Leafs will simulate a game day on Saturday, complete with a morning skate at Scotiabank Arena and 7 p.m. puck drop for the intra-squad matchup. With no exhibition games being held across the NHL this year and the regular season due to open Wednesday against Montreal, Keefe views it as an important preparation tool.

"We're going to try to replicate that as close as possible with our meeting times and all of the procedures we would typically go through in our preparations for any game," he said.

- The coach had strong praise for captain John Tavares, who has benefitted physically from the long off-season. Tavares dealt with an oblique injury before last season and then broke a finger in October and that made for a challenging start to the campaign.

"What I like about John is it's very clear that he has prepared for the season in a big way," said Keefe. "To me he looks in incredible shape and strong. We had a very challenging day here — on Day 1, especially — with the skating and the way we started the training camp, with a conditioning skate, and he was as strong as anybody right to the very end."

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Andersson serves up powerful reminder of potential 2021 impact

Eric Francis@EricFrancis

January 7, 2021, 11:40 PM

It took all of 80 seconds into the team's first intrasquad scrimmage for Rasmus Andersson to serve up a powerful reminder of just how prominent a role he'll play for the Calgary Flames this season.

Seconds into Team McDonald's first power play of the night, the 24-year-old Swede had the draw snapped back to him at the blue line where he took a few strides before unleashing one the hardest clappers on the team.

It's a sequence that will be played out countless times over the next handful of years, as Andersson appears poised to run Calgary's top power play this season.

Yes, with the departure of T.J. Brodie it became all but official – it's Andersson's time.

"I feel ready and excited for it – I'm excited to show the coaching staff I'm the man for the job," said Andersson prior to the club's first of two camp scrimmages aimed at simulating game night.

"To me it's all about taking care of the opportunity and making the most of it, showing them I can play up there. It's a position all defencemen want. I felt personally I played pretty good in the playoffs and I want to take that confidence with me into this season."

Andersson has opened camp paired with good friend Noah Hanifin, as he was in last year's playoffs and various other times the last two seasons. The top pairing is Mark Giordano with Chris Tanev, largely so brass can see how well they kill penalties together.

Those pairings are subject to change, perhaps often, as it's anticipated Andersson will get the plum assignment Brodie left behind, alongside Giordano. It's befitting the six-year, \$27.3-million extension he signed last year.

Either way, his role as the lone defenceman on the top power play unit was listed as highly probable once Erik Gustafsson signed with Philadelphia.

Giordano had run the power play for years, and will undoubtedly run the second unit, but at age 37 the team needs to find ways to manage his minutes.

Andersson's heavy shot, poise with the puck and calm demeanour make him the best candidate.

"Me and (coach Geoff) Ward have good communication and we've talked about it quite a bit likely - I told him the most comfortable position for me is at the top because I've played it all my life," said Andersson of his blueline perch directing traffic, distributing pucks and, well, firing away.

"I've got to bring the puck up the ice with a lot of purpose and try to give as much space to Johnny (Gaudreau), Monny (Sean Monahan), Chucky (Matthew Tkachuk) and Lindy (Elias Lindholm) and when I have the opportunity to shoot I take it. I want to show everybody I can play the position well. I feel great they put the confidence in me and I'm going to show them every night I'm the guy."

He certainly started well Thursday evening — adding a wraparound goal for good measure — making his ascension one of the biggest stories of camp.

Early scouting report on the man who arrived in camp from Russia to be the team's sixth defenceman, Nikita Nesterov: "The game is easy for him. You can tell he's played an awful lot of hockey. He's played in the NHL before and you can see he's a confident defenceman who understands exactly what he brings to a team and plays within those parameters."

The five-foot-11, 192-pound 27-year-old was a fifth-round pick of the Lightning in 2011 who played 160 NHL games before returning Russia for a three-year stint in which he captained the national team, won Olympic gold and a KHL title.



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The left-shooting veteran has a one-way contract and will likely play on the right side, opposite Juuso Valimaki to start the season. On Thursday he appeared as comfortable as Ward suggested.

His chief competition for the sixth spot comes from college free-agent signing Connor Mackey and Oliver Kyllington, who both have experience playing on the right side. Kyllington is still in quarantine following immigration holdups, and won't join the team until after the second/final scrimmage Monday

Newbies Dominik Simon and Josh Leivo split time on the right side of Monahan and Gaudreau's line. Simon is known as a tenacious forechecker who can dig pucks out for top scorers like Sidney Crosby in Pittsburgh, but he also has a pretty slick set of mitts. Leivo made a sweet pass from behind the net to set Matthew Tkachuk up for a nice finish. He's a large man who should be a good fit at both ends

Team McDonald wound up beating Team Iginla 5-2. The goal scorers included Joakim Nordstrom (two including empty netter), Monahan, Tkachuk and Andersson for the winners and Emilio Pettersen and Andrew Mangiapane for the losers. David Rittich went the distance in net to outlast Jacob Markstrom.

One of the prettiest plays of the night came courtesy of 21-year-old Adam Ruzicka, who pulled up goal-side with a nifty move to dish up an easy finish for 20-year-old Pettersen.

Mangiapane, perhaps the best candidate for a breakout season, made no mistake in alone to beat Markstrom.

It's always interesting to see how five-foot-seven, 155-pound Matthew Phillips looks against NHL giants. A great example of how he was able to be successful in the AHL the last two years came in the second period when six-foot-two, 202-pound Eetu Tuulola was draped all over the youngster, who still wouldn't cough up the puck.

Mark Giordano seamlessly took over from Jarome Iginla many years ago as the fittest Flame. However, with abbreviated camps came abbreviated fitness testing.

Unlike past years when players have been put through a series of different tests, this year's testing revolved largely around force plate jumps, which measure the power generated when an athlete jumps vertically. It has put the 37-year-old's title belt in question, and he doesn't seem very happy about it.

"Some guys are trying to claim they won fitness testing based on the force plate jumps, but there's a lot more to fitness than that," said Giordano, whose club won't release testing results this year due to their simplicity. Very few are actually questioning whether the former Norris Trophy winner is still the fittest.

The game was also a warmup for game night production staff who added goal songs, light shows and announcements, including a directive to observe a moment of silence for fallen Calgary Sgt. Andrew Harnett, who was killed New Year's Eve by a driver fleeing a traffic stop. The game was played with a constant din of crowd noise that sounded like a clothes dryer when it wasn't punctuated with louder reactions.

Sam Bennett was kept from the game for precautionary reasons and is listed as day-to-day. The team brought in local NHL officials for the game, relieving assistant GM Craig Conroy of the gig he had in last summer's pre-playoff camp. The Flames are off Friday.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Training Camp Day 5: Barzal-watch continues at Islanders camp

Emily Sadler@EmmySadler

January 7, 2021, 2:14 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.

Girgensons issues statement after season-ending injury

One day after being ruled out for the season due to a hamstring injury, Buffalo Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons took to Twitter to wish his teammates luck:

Girgensons was injured during a scrimmage on Monday and underwent surgery on Wednesday. His recovery timeline is set at approximately six months, ruling him out for the upcoming shortened season.

Fresh start for Puljujarvi includes new number

Since re-joining the Edmonton Oilers following a lengthy absence, forward Jesse Puljujarvi has been committed to a fresh start with the club. Reports out of Edmonton as well as his own media appearances have been really positive, with Puljujarvi finding fast chemistry with teammates and enjoying being back in the NHL fold with the team that drafted him fourth overall in 2016.

His fresh start in Edmonton even includes a new number. The team announced on Wednesday that No. 98 is now No. 13.

Oilers head coach Dave Tippett said during his media availability later Wednesday that believes "it's good that he's got a fresh start."

"He's coming to a fresh start with a new number," Tippett told reporters. "I think it's a good thing for him. He's a different person than he was before here, from everything that I hear, so he might as well start with a new number. I got no issue with it at all."

Oiler's Bouchard confident, bringing lessons from Sweden

One thing we're hearing a lot about from players is how many of them used the extended break in 2020 to work on themselves and hone their individual skills. That time is particularly key for young players trying to break into the league as full-timers. The delayed 2020-21 season also gave some players the opportunity to play overseas and improve their game that way. Edmonton Oilers defenceman Evan Bouchard, who had a seven-game NHL stint last season and played most of the year with the AHL Bakersfield Condors, did exactly that -- the rearguard was loaned to Södertälje SK in Sweden, and said Thursday that experience gave him "a different perspective" on the game:

"There's a lot more confidence now," he told reporters. "You get that extra time to really get to know yourself on the ice. Going over there to Sweden, it really gives you a different perspective on the way you play the game. So, I think that helped me."

Crawford's camp absence continues

A story that's being monitored in New Jersey is the status of veteran netminder Corey Crawford, who has been absent from Devils training camp practices this week.

Crawford took a personal day on Wednesday and is absent again Thursday. He took a maintenance day on Sunday, and Tuesday was a team-wide day off.

The former Chicago Blackhawk signed with the Devils in free agency, a veteran presence to complement young starter MacKenzie Blackwood and ease some of the load off the 24-year-old.

Bergeron wears the 'C' for spoked B



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Boston Bruins announced Thursday that Patrice Bergeron will take over the captaincy following the departure of longtime leader Zdeno Chara.

Already a longstanding part of the leadership core both on the scoresheet and in the locker room, Bergeron was the natural choice to take over. It was so obvious, in fact, that the Bruins were able to have a little fun with the announcement:

Barzal-watch continues on Long Island

It's the fifth day of New York Islanders training camp, and the contract status of star RFA Mathew Barzal remains unresolved.

Reported signings of Matt Martin, Cory Schneider, and Andy Greene -- still not made official by the team -- make the roster a little clearer, but Islanders GM Lou Lamoriello's leak-proof front office makes all negotiations with Barzal a mystery.

Looking at situations between other your RFAs, like Patrik Laine in Winnipeg and Pierre-Luc Dubois in Columbus, it's easy to speculate that there's tension on Long Island -- but Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman cautions that's not likely the case. During an appearance on Hockey Central on Thursday, Friedman indicated that the situation is more about sorting logistics than any discontent between player and team.

"I don't get any sense there's an issue with Barzal and the Islanders," Friedman said.

Friedman shared his thoughts on why he believes that while a long-term is the mutual goal, the two sides might have to settle on a bridge deal for now.

"I had heard that if it was a long-term deal, he was looking at the Marner/Rantanen comparables -- which he should look at, that's what he should aim for," said Friedman. (For reference, Mitch Marner signed a six-year pact with the Maple Leafs worth \$10.893 million a year, while Rantanen's deal with the Avalanche comes in at \$9.25 million per year for six years.)

"Barring the Islanders being able to move some bodies out, I just don't know if they can do that," said Friedman. "I think Barzal wanted a long-term deal, I think they're happy to give him a long-term deal. I just don't know if they can. So, I've been led to believe that it was going to be bridge, and if you look at the Islanders' cap situation I think it really clears up in the summer of 2023. So, if they go bridge, and then they can extend him, that might be the more likely scenario... but it doesn't mean that they haven't tried to go longer-term."

So, the wait continues.

Winnipeg Jets head coach Paul Maurice told reporters about his decision to move speedy forward Nikolaj Ehlers up during Thursday's media availability:

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing major NHL award favourites and their betting values

Justin Bourne@jtbourne

January 7, 2021, 3:05 PM

As sports betting grabs a stronger foothold in the life of your casual sports fan, new opportunities have arisen. You can bet on just about

anything, from team and player point totals, to the winner of a coin toss in football. That includes the winners of the NHL's major awards.

Full disclosure before I go any further here: I'm a voting member of the PHWA on these, and as such, won't actually be placing a bet on anything discussed below. But with that, I can hopefully point you in the direction some voters (and one specific one!) are thinking heading into a new season.

This is setting up to be a strange year, which means we should open our minds to the possibility of some unusual results. What that means for gamblers is that there might be a chance to hit on a player with longer odds.

To wit: do I think Victor Hedman is going to win the Hart Trophy? I do not. Do I think it's impossible that the best defenceman in the league has a great year on the best team in the league and puts up enough points to be in the conversation? Not impossible, no, and a \$10 bet on Coolbet would win you \$950 in return. How about Robin Lehner for that trophy? Not likely to win it! But a \$10 bet on him would pay you \$1,600, and over a four-month regular season could you see him being the No. 1 on one of the best teams in hockey and posting some wacky save percentage from which voters can't look away?

Let's get into these conversations more, looking at the following trophies: Hart, Norris, Calder, Richard and Art Ross. All odds via Coolbet.

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

HART TROPHY

Top-10 favourites including ties:

Here's what I would do with your money: I would take the amount you're comfortable spreading across awards trophy bets, then place it all solely on Connor McDavid +450 for Hart. Maybe you wanted to go \$10 on each award, well, \$50 on this bet wins you \$275.

I'm of the opinion McDavid is the most talented player in the NHL. He's in his absolute prime -- you know that year on the hockey card where people go "oh wow he went off there, hey?" -- and he's on a good offensive team in a soft defensive division. There will be a lot of voting eyeballs on said division, too. I also think there's some element of competitiveness there after his teammate just won the trophy. You know he's not content ending his career with just one.

But, for conversation's sake ... things happen. McDavid's been around five seasons, and has seen names like Taylor Hall, Nikita Kucherov and yes, Leon Draisaitl win the Hart. He's been injured in the past. So a few other picks that I like? I swear they won't all be favourites, buuu...

I voted for Nate MacKinnon to win last year, and voted for him the year Hall won. There's a definite element with awards voting of players being "due." MacKinnon, if anyone, is "due" his Hart Trophy.

Here's a helpful graphic from @FauxCentre:

MacKinnon looked impossibly dominant at times in playoffs, and at +550 you've got a good chance of cashing in. Maybe take that McDavid bet and spread it across two names?

For longer odds picks I mentioned Hedman and Lehner, but hey: When was the last time you could get a rested and healthy Sidney Crosby at +2400?

NORRIS TROPHY

Top-10 favourites:

My vibes on general voter opinion is that a guy like Roman Josi was a compromise last year -- voters didn't just pick the guy with the most points (John Carlson), and Hedman was too far statistically behind for some (he was 10 back of Carlson, though I still voted for him), so Josi got it done. I don't expect a repeat (and please don't take "not the guy I'm picking to be the best in the league" as a slight. Josi is excellent).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Hedman's the favourite for sure, but he's not guaranteed to have the numbers like some others, so, worthwhile picks:

Alex Pietrangelo has public sentiment behind him, and is going to QB the power play for one of the best teams in hockey. If he has the numbers, the love for him is certainly there.

The boys who went No. 1 and No. 2 last season in Calder voting are in positions to get crazy points this upcoming season, and both are +1300 (\$10 pays \$140). Hughes is PP1 on a Canucks team that has great top-end talent, and should be able to score at 5-on-5, and we know how involved he is in the offence. Makar is so gifted, and that Avalanche team has so much firepower, he could put up gaudy totals on a great team.

On the "due" front, the noise is getting steadily louder around Seth Jones (+2100) and his partner, Zach Werenski, gets his share of love, too (+2400). You could do worse than a couple guys with longer odds too – if Shea Weber is healthy, and in a division with a ton of voter eyeballs, is +3100 worth a flyer? How about Morgan Rielly given the team he plays for, and finally having a D partner in TJ Brodie? He's +2400.

CALDER TROPHY

Top-10 favourites:

I'm not going to pretend to know anything about junior hockey players or how they stack up against others from overseas, but I do know this: Igor Shestorkin is extremely good and going to start at Madison Square Garden for a potentially improved Rangers team ... but at just +250 behind that defence, I'm gonna pass. On the other hand, Ilya Sorokin could end up carrying the load for a good and defensively sound New York Islanders team, and +2900, boy, that's a lot more appetizing, isn't it?

My buddy Anthony Stewart can't believe you can get Quinton Byfield for +4400, and really, there's good value there. I'll leave the rest up for your own personal taste aside from these two notes: to me the Alexis Lafreniere odds don't pay enough for the risk, and Tim Stuetzle is unfortunately on a team that isn't going to score enough. I'm not saying he can't win it, but his team hampers my opinion of that bet more than the player himself.

ART ROSS TROPHY

Top-10 favourites:

Of course McDavid is the guy, but now we're talking worse odds than the Hart Trophy numbers, with a payout of just +320. There's not really a number I like at the top, so in looking for value, one name stands out to me: Mitch Marner at +1900. I think he's a point-generating machine who was not very good (by the standards he's held to) last season, and he was still well beyond a point per game, with 67 in 59 games.

Yes, the boys in Edmonton and Colorado are rightly favoured, but hey, Marner with his mojo back alongside prime Matthews with an improved D that can move the puck up the ice? In his fifth season in a division the Leafs are favoured? Where a \$50 bet wins you \$1,000? Worse bets have been made.

There are other names worth taking longer shots at too – some on the Penguins, Avs and Rangers, to name a few – but Marner's my favourite balance of "has a chance" and "actually pays."

And finally...

ROCKET RICHARD TROPHY

Top-10 favourites:

This is the year it's Auston Matthews' to lose. His name was left off the trophy by a goal last season, and this time around the two that beat him out have some issues. For Alex Ovechkin, it's straight up age. The mid-point of the previous regular season was a year ago, and while you never want to bet against Ovechkin, at some point Father Time wins this war and he slows down even just a bit. It's not insane to think he may only finish in the top-five in goals, and not with the most. David Pastrnak,

meanwhile, had his hip repaired in September and will be slow to get started this season, missing some time in the early going.

While there's a number of notable challengers, many of the other names are more prone to dish than Matthews. It just feels like this is the year he establishes himself as the game's best pure scorer, provided he stays healthy. And +450 is just enough of a payout that I think it's worthwhile.

So that's it! (I won't dive in on Vezina because goaltending is past my area of expertise.) I'm always interested to see what others think, and to hear if there are other bets worth discussing. Were there any odds above you think are worth a go?

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Sportsnet.ca / Toronto Maple Leafs season preview: Can they break through in 2021?

Luke Fox@lukefoxjukebox

January 7, 2021, 12:18 PM

"You don't have forever," Kyle Dubas proclaimed after tweaking and setting his Toronto Maple Leafs roster for the sprint that will be 2020-21.

"We had big expectations coming into [last] year, and to lose in a qualification round is disappointing. It's far short of the goal that we've set for ourselves and the standard that we hope to attain — that we will attain in time here."

Short of the standard has been the Maple Leafs' story for so long that losing playoff series is the most familiar of pains for the city's hockey fans.

The window for this talent-loaded core won't always be open — Auston Matthews, UFA 2024! — and their chance to dominate may never be this great.

Outlook: Cautiously optimistic. But absolutely optimistic.

Finally freed of juggernauts like Boston and Tampa Bay, Toronto will be presented with its best shot at a divisional title, first-round home ice, and some dang confidence heading into the post-season.

Dubas and head coach Sheldon Keefe are preaching urgency and regular-season success, and the roster has been overstaffed with athletes who have something to prove. Jobs, legacies, contract extensions... plenty will be laid on the line.

Depth has been added from the crease on out. Brodie and Bogosian, in particular, give an oft-criticized blue line a safer, more defensive look. Thornton, Simmonds, and the return of Jason Spezza add a second layer of wisdom and scar tissue.

Ultimately, however, the success or failure of the '21 Leafs will fall on its stars. Can Matthews and Mitch Marner and John Tavares and William Nylander and Morgan Rielly and Frederik Andersen turn four years of disappointment into dogged determination? Can they elevate their battle level the way Tampa stars Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and Victor Hedman did in 2020?

"I think the guys are starting to realize here they're not 18, 19 anymore," Dubas said. "If we want to set ourselves up as best as possible going into the playoffs, we cannot let our foot off the gas in the regular season."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The onus will fall to Keefe to not only manage a new staff (welcome, Manny Malhotra and Paul MacLean) but mix the proper lineup and convince his team that the sum can be greater than its parts.

"The experience we had in the qualification round, the loss that we had there, we still feel that," Keefe said.

Fans should hope so.

The key for a core with so much promise and so few results?

"Really embracing the fact that this is a wonderful opportunity. If they're willing to sacrifice a little bit in each of their own individual realms," Dubas said, "then we'll really reach our full potential."

Remaining Time -1:56

Foligno says Blue Jackets' confidence shocked Maple Leafs during playoffs

X-Factor: Frederik Andersen

Toronto's undisputed No. 1 goaltender is following up his worst season (if you're judging by save percentage) with his most important one. Four consecutive post-season series losses have brought the talented Dane and the Maple Leafs to a crossroads clouded by trade rumours.

One path leads to another early ouster and the sides parting ways. The other could result in an on-ice breakthrough for this roster and the potential for a contract extension for its backbone. The carrot of a Jacob Markstrom-like off-season windfall dangles before the first-time UFA, while the mental pressures and internal competition (Jack Campbell, Aaron Dell) thrust on Andersen's plate have never been greater during his Leafs tenure.

"If I play well, things are going to be easier for me going forward. And if I play well, it'll be good for the team," Andersen says of his contract year. "My focus right now is just having fun with it. Enjoy being part of this group."

Soar or sink, Andersen will be a chief protagonist in the 2021 Leafs' story.

Remaining Time -0:57

Andersen knows he needs to play well for Maple Leafs in contract year

Player who could surprise: Nick Robertson

What was more telling: That the teenage Robertson elected not to travel home and spend the off-season surrounded by the comfort of family? Or that the skilled winger was not loaned to Team USA for the world juniors because the tournament overlapped with Leafs training camp?

There is a fierce hunger and great opportunity here for Robertson — ineligible for the AHL, nothing left to prove in the OHL — to not only make the pro roster but fight through a more experienced crowd and carve out regular minutes in Toronto's top nine.

The 19-year-old will need to outperform familiar names and bigger bodies to stick (and avoid an entry-level contract slide), but after 55 goals in 46 games for the Peterborough Petes in 2019-20, the hype is real.

Can the rookie with the fierce internal drive and the newly shortened stick make an immediate impact? Or will he have to wait, taxi and develop before asserting himself as a full-time Leaf?

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens notebook: Anderson looks ready to live up to high expectations

Eric Engels@EricEngels

January 7, 2021, 7:27 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — Leave it to Claude Julien to offer us the perfect disclaimer for this notebook about the first game action we witnessed for the Montreal Canadiens this year.

"You don't want to over-analyze it, because the reason you're doing that is you want to give your guys a chance to get into game-like situations where they're under pressure, where they gotta make quick decisions and all that stuff," the coach started. "What happens [Thursday], it's not about critiquing every mistake that's made, because that's what these scrimmages are for is that you're trying to get your guys to play the right way, and the only way to do that is to work your way through it.

"There's going to be mistakes, and guys learn from those things and they get used to the pressure, and the next time we scrimmage you hope that it's even smoother. There's a part of that that you just gotta let them scrimmage."

So if you're watching the highlights from Thursday's intra-squad game and cursing Joel Edmundson for a failed zone exit, take a breath.

Still, there was some stuff we saw that stood out to us as worthy of some analysis.

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

Josh Anderson looks like Josh Anderson

It was anything but a given that Josh Anderson would sprint out of the gate.

He was limited to 26 games last season due to a shoulder injury — he played most of them injured and looked nothing like the player who put up 27 goals the year prior — and he last appeared in a game in December of 2019.

But after saying Wednesday he's not even thinking about his shoulder anymore and that he feels 100 per cent healthy, Anderson played at 100 per cent on Thursday and looked very much like his old self.

Boy, it is something to watch him skate down the wing in full flight.

Anderson is six-foot-three and 226 pounds, and he moves like a guy half his size.

Not that anyone should be surprised by that. Speed is the main feature of Anderson's game.

That, combined with his physicality and scoring touch, is what makes him one of the more unique forwards in the NHL.

And it's obvious Anderson's eager to show he's going to be that player in Montreal. As Tyler Toffoli said on Wednesday, "Everybody watching practice and the highlights and whatever that's out there, they can tell he has a jump in his step."

You could definitely see it in this first game.

Jesper Kotkaniemi looking confident and aggressive

Much like he did in the in the playoffs several months ago, Jesperi Kotkaniemi showed very well in this game.

The chemistry between him and Joel Armia remains intact, but it's also certainly building between him and Tyler Toffoli, as the two combined for a goal.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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It was Kotkaniemi who scored it, following up Toffoli's net drive and pushing a rebound past Carey Price.

Toffoli also had one on the power play, a nice shot Jonathan Drouin set up for him.

Remaining Time -0:43

Jake Allen impressed by Kotkaniemi's shot, but can't pronounce his name

Anyways... back to Kotkaniemi. The six-foot-two, 201-pound Finn was hard on the forecheck, throwing several checks and getting into the battles on the wall and in the corners.

You get the sense Kotkaniemi realized during his bubble experience that engaging physically is going to be essential to give himself the space he needs to have his skills shine through.

Julien agrees.

"It definitely helps him, especially with his size," said Julien about Kotkaniemi. "He's a big player who's pretty strong, and I look at the goal he scored in front of the net today on a second effort and that physical play was something that allowed him to have success in the playoffs. So I think he's continuing to build on that element. He's very capable of being physical."

Kotkaniemi's also very capable of shooting the puck, which is something his teammates and the coaching staff would like to see him do more often, as Gallagher was alluding to earlier this week.

Canadiens goaltender Jake Allen had the line of the day when we asked him if any of the Canadiens shooters have surprised him so far at camp.

"Kotkaniemi," Allen said. "I can't pronounce his name yet, but his shot is next level. That kid's got an absolute missile of a wrist."

Jake Evans in the 4 slot

With the way the Canadiens arranged their lineups for the scrimmage, their fourth line of Paul Byron-Jake Evans -Arturri Lehkonen joined Victor Mete, Price and the taxi squad/AHL bound players on Team White.

What was compelling was seeing the Evans line up against Phillip Danault, Tomas Tatar and Gallagher, if only because Evans really did well in the matchup.

The progress has been steady for him since being drafted 207th overall in 2014 — from his years at Notre Dame to his two seasons with the AHL's Laval Rocket to his limited action with Montreal last year. His speed was a factor in helping the Canadiens in the playoffs, and he's looked even faster at camp this year.

If Evans started with an edge in the competition for a job as fourth-line centre, he's maintaining it.

Evans got the better of Danault in the faceoff circle more than a couple of times in this scrimmage. That's where he can play a big role on this team this season, being one of only two right-handed centremen among the 12 forwards expected to be in the starting lineup.

Evans was over 51 per cent in the dot in 13 regular-season games with the Canadiens last season, but he was just under 45 per cent in his six games in the bubble. Julien said Wednesday he wants to rely on him to take some draws in the defensive zone and give Danault a break wherever he can, so it'll be vital for Evans to be good in that department.

We don't blame you for thinking it.

As you watched the Canadiens add Michael Frolik and Corey Perry to a team loaded on the wing and up against the NHL's salary cap, we know it made you wonder about what they were going to do with Byron, and we totally understand why it did.

Byron's a player with three years left on a contract that counts for \$3.4 million annually against the cap, a two-time 20-goal scorer coming off a

down season that was certainly impacted by a slump out of the gate and a three-month recovery from a knee injury, and it's only natural to be thinking about him getting paid that much to take a spot on the fourth line.

As you crunch the numbers and try to figure out how the Canadiens will comply with the cap and avoid potentially losing players like Frolik or Perry or Mete to waivers, it's an easy conclusion to jump to that moving Byron could provide the flexibility the Canadiens need.

But it's just as easy to forget about the value Byron brings to the Canadiens, and we'd caution against the idea that GM Marc Bergevin is just looking to offload him for cap space.

Byron's an assistant captain, a heart-and-soul player, and he's one of the most versatile members of the roster.

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.

Knowing that, we asked Julien on Wednesday if he intends to use Byron as he always has.

We weren't exactly surprised by his answer.

"I don't see any reason why his role should be any different," Julien started. "If he was able to be a Swiss Army Knife player before, there's no reason that he can't do that still. His game hasn't changed, his skating is still the same. And again, injuries sometimes slow you down in a season, but he's pretty healthy right now. He seems to be going pretty well. Watching him skate, I see no issues there."

"As for how he's going to be used, I think you have to wait and see how this season unfolds and what happens. I adjust on a daily basis, whether there's injuries or non-injuries, whether a guy is playing well, whether a guy is struggling. I adjust, so I can't define his role right now as this is what it's going to be. But one thing we like is we talked about him being able to play centre as well, he's a versatile player and he's played all three positions up front."

Now Julien didn't say that because he intends to start Byron at centre, though several people jumped to that conclusion when we tweeted these comments out on Wednesday.

Julien said it just to reinforce how versatile a player Byron is, and he was alluding to a point he made earlier in his Zoom conference about being able to rely on Byron at centre in the event that one of Nick Suzuki, Kotkaniemi, Danault or Evans gets injured.

From the wing, Byron's speed gave some of the Canadiens' best players fits on Thursday.

And we don't know if Byron's as worried about his job security as some of the fans think he should be, but he made quite a statement in the opening minutes of this game — blocking Edmundson's shot and storming down on a breakaway from his own blue line before deking Allen out with a forehand-backhand goal to put Team White up 1-0.

We thought Drouin was the best player on the ice on Thursday.

You can see the chemistry he built with Suzuki in the bubble transferring to the practices we've seen so far and the game that took place on Thursday.

He made some eye-popping plays.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 8, 2021

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers notebook: Bouchard comfortable, confident after Sweden stint

Mark Spector@sportsnetspec

January 7, 2021, 7:03 PM

EDMONTON — A year ago it was Ethan Bear who didn't look quite the same, didn't talk quite the same way. Who caught our attention for different things than before.

Bear went on to become the fifth-round pick who led all NHL rookies in ice time last season, while Evan Bouchard — a first-rounder from 2018 — went south to begin his pro career in Bakersfield, as the fateful 2019-20 season began.

This training camp it's Bouchard who is turning heads, somehow turning 23 games in Sodertälje — Sweden's second division — into a career leap that just may help him to begin his NHL career this January.

"A lot more confidence now," is what Bouchard sees as the difference. "Going to Sweden, you get an extra perspective on the way you play the game. That helped me (get) a lot more confidence. I think that's a big part of the game."

The knock on Bouchard was that he played the game from the proverbial rocking chair. Slow and methodical. He lacked urgency and some quickness.

Today, the right shot defenceman has shown up in Edmonton leaner, quicker, and looking very much like an NHL player. At least, that's how he looks from the stands.

"I know that for a fact (that he is), with some of the testing we did," Oilers head coach Dave Tippett said. "He's come in in great shape, and he's played most of the year (in Sweden) and he's played very well in the time we've had him here."

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

Bouchard played under Sodertälje head coach and long-time NHLer Mikael Samuelsson. The former Canuck rubbed off on Bouchard, in a positive way.

"I learned a lot from him, about work ethic and everything," Bouchard said. "He doesn't like to lose, and that really stuck with me. Playing for someone like that really helped me ... to get that mindset, to believe in me."

You would think that a defenceman who needs to work on his urgency would not be well-served by apprenticing on the big ice in Europe, where the game comes at him more slowly. But in another sign of maturity, Bouchard think he found ways to overcome that.

"The NHL has more battling, but there are things that you can work on ... and if you can do them on the bigger ice it will make it that much easier on the smaller ice," he said.

Remember, we're talking about a 21-year-old player here. Young players have to mature in so many ways before they are ready for the heat lamp that the NHL can be, a process that Tippett has witnessed hundreds of times.

"You can tell he's a confident player," Tippett said, "but more than anything, he is maturing as a person and as a player. As that maturity process comes to fruition, he gets more comfortable and confident.

"You saw it with Ethan Bear last year, you're going to see it with Caleb Jones this year, and Bouch is going through that process of becoming a good NHL player," Tippett continued. "He's got lots of talent, he's got lots of desire, and he's learning how to do things — both off and on the ice. You have to let those players go through the process to become a good player before you can actually call them a good player.

"He's moving in the right direction, and with the breaks we've had, every time we've seen him he takes another step forward."

We suspect he'll stay with the Oilers, at least until the AHL is ready to play in February. By then, Bouchard may have earned a spot in Edmonton for good.

The Oilers held their first scrimmage on Thursday, as they got back into their own building after the World Juniors. Connor McDavid scored twice, including the overtime winner, while Jesse Puljujarvi forced overtime when he rattled home a loose puck with just seconds left on the clock.

Only James Neal and Gaetan Haas are still listed as "unfit to play." Neal has been around the rink, but a Haas sighting has yet to occur.

"Neal is skating, Haas isn't," Tippett said. "I don't anticipate either of them back any time soon."

It was Dominik Kahun's first skate as an Oiler, and he made one lovely play as he found Seth Griffith in the slot with a lovely pass that made you wonder, how on earth did Kahun see the former Manitoba Moose in the first place?

"He's an interesting player," said Tippett. "Great skill, great vision."

When Kahun signed in Edmonton, it was a toss up on how many of his friends wanted to know about him and his new team, and how many asked about Leon Draisaitl.

"In Germany, Leon got the Sportsman of the Year (award), so everyone is talking about Leon. When I signed in Edmonton, everyone asked me about it," said Kahun, who goes way back with Draisaitl. "We played together for five years and lived in the same apartment together. If anyone asks me about Leon, it is always hard to say, because we are so close."

Kahun played on a line with Evgeni Malkin in Pittsburgh, and is sure to get a shot on Draisaitl's left side here in Edmonton. It's only a matter of time.

"Leon is a top player in the league, and Malkin too. They are both very, very skilled," Kahun said. "They can both move the puck, shoot and score. With Leon, I played a long time with him. On the national team we always played together. The connection would still be there a little bit."

Tippett will be the one who decides when Kahun is ready for the job. But a Kahun, Draisaitl, Kailer Yamamoto line would be quick and talented, of that there is no doubt.

"He adds skill to our group, and has a relationship with Leon," Tippett said. "I've watched him for the last couple of years. He's a smaller guy but he's competitive, and he'd got great vision. We were looking to add depth at some skill positions, and it was a good signing for us. He looks like he can be a good player for us."

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators notebook: Logan Brown impressing so far in push to make team

Wayne Scanlan

January 7, 2021, 3:38 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 8, 2021

By this point, members of the media are probably as weary of asking Logan Brown questions about making the Senators roster as he is answering them.

Let's call this the make or break year for the six-foot-six, 220-pound centre, drafted by the Senators in the first round, 11th overall (OHL Windsor) way back in 2016.

When healthy, Brown has shown he can put up good numbers and run a power play. In 2019-20, Brown had seven goals and 28 points in 25 games for AHL Belleville, and eight points in 23 NHL games with Ottawa.

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

Although Brown doesn't like to talk about being at a career crossroads here, many see it that way.

"Coming into camp every year I'm trying to make the NHL," Brown said, on a Zoom call with reporters on Thursday, "This year especially.

"I had a lot of time over the last nine months to get ready and take a job here. That's my plan, that's my goal."

One entry onto the roster could be Brown's slick entries into the zone on the power play, plus his puck work setting up with the extra man. Head coach D.J. Smith has mentioned the power play as an area of focus this year, and Brown has impressed in that area.

"He's been really good in special team practices, he excels on the power play," Smith says.

"He has great hands on entry. He made a nice play on a (scrimmage) goal. And he scored a goal on the backside. He's pushing hard for a spot."

Brown takes pride in his ability to protect the puck and distribute it with the extra man.

"The power play is something I always enjoyed doing and really focus on," he says. "I try to use it to my advantage. Hopefully, I can get the opportunity to show him what I can do there and help the team out with a better power play."

Brown said he worked on every aspect of his game during the nine-month layoff and has grown as a player and a person in 2020.

"It's the most dedicated summer I've had," Brown says. "My mindset has changed a lot. I'm living it day by day.

"This is my fourth year with the Sens and my fifth camp. I continue to grow and learn. Mentally I'm in a good spot here and hopefully, that's enough.

"All I can do right now is be hungry every day, try to push myself and win a spot."

With veteran centre Derek Stepan not cleared to join the team until Sunday, Brown has had his opportunities to play on top lines. On Thursday he centred a line with wingers Brady Tkachuk and Evgenii Dadonov.

Smith said the roster spots being battled for among young forwards like Brown, Josh Norris, Rudolfs Balcers, and more, will be determined off a critical Friday scrimmage and then the final days of camp prior to Ottawa's Jan. 15 opener against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"It's going to come down to how guys do in the last five, six days of camp," Smith says. "We're going to push really hard here and see if guys drop off or not. Guys you think could be in the starting lineup today could change. Things will happen and guys will drop with the pace and conditioning and what have you."

For the first time in camp, the Senators split into a main group and a 'B' squad for practice sessions. Notable on the 'B' Group were forward prospects Alex Formenton and Egor Sokolov plus defence hopefuls Christian Jaros and Max Lajoie.

Veteran centre Chris Tierney also skated with the 'B' squad but he is returning from an injury.

Goaltender Joey Daccord was in that group as well. His Belleville tandem partner last season, Filip Gustavsson, was absent. Smith said Gustavsson wasn't feeling well.

Smith called Thursday's session the most impressive since Ottawa started its training camp on Dec. 31.

"This was probably our best day of camp," Smith said. "We're starting to get that mentality that we have to work to be in this (North) division. I thought today was a great day."

Smith says the separation between the NHL group and the rest is about to get more pronounced.

"We are starting to trend in that direction but we still have some guys who haven't skated with us yet," Smith said. "There's guys fighting for spots right now. Tomorrow we're having a scrimmage that will help or hurt some guys and that will really help us get where we need to be."

Following Friday's scrimmage, the Senators are scheduled to have a day off on Saturday. When they return to the ice on Sunday, it is expected that forward prospect Tim Stuetzle, veteran centre Derek Stepan and defensive hopeful Erik Brannstrom will join the team after completing their COVID-19 protocols.

Stuetzle, Ottawa's third overall draft choice in 2020, was in quarantine following his participation in the world juniors in Edmonton. Stepan was in Arizona with his wife for the birth of their third child. Brannstrom, who had been expected to join Ottawa's camp on time, was in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and was quarantined as a precaution.

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.

As he usually does in the off-season, winger Drake Batherson skated with Sidney Crosby and other players from Nova Scotia. Batherson, who looks to be a lock to start the season with Ottawa, said he practiced with the Pittsburgh Penguins captain for "close to two months" before arriving in Ottawa on Dec. 11.

In his fourth Senators camp, Batherson has had lots of company from Cape Breton, including four players who have played with the same Cape Breton Eagles organization that launched Batherson's career.

Forwards Egor Sokolov and Logan Shaw plus goaltenders Kevin Mandolese and Francois Brassard are all in Ottawa's camp.

"It's been fun having all these Eagles here," Batherson said. "It's great to see for the Eagles organization, too, that we can all have success there and then come here and see each other again."

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Sportsnet.ca / Ehlers getting early nod over Connor on Jets' top line

Ken Wiebe@WiebesWorld

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 8, 2021

WINNIPEG - The debate has been raging for quite some time and has only intensified.

This chicken-and-egg query revolves around usage for the Winnipeg Jets wingers and the question isn't about to go away anytime soon.

The talent among the top-six — especially on the wing — has been evident for some time, though that hasn't prevented the masses from vociferously picking one side or the other.

Who is the Jets' top left-winger?

When it comes to traditional stats as a measuring point in sheer productivity, Kyle Connor is No. 1 with a bullet.

With three consecutive 30-plus goal seasons under his belt, Connor holds the decisive edge over Nikolaj Ehlers in terms of the raw numbers.

Plus, Connor enjoys the obvious benefits of being on the top power-play unit, while Ehlers' time with the man-advantage has been much more limited.

So when training camp opened with Ehlers on the top line with Mark Scheifele and captain Blake Wheeler, observers and players alike took notice.

Under normal circumstances, testing out combinations is standard fare when there are a number of exhibition games on the horizon.

It should be noted this isn't the first time Ehlers is riding shotgun on the top line — even if Connor has featured there more frequently.

"Hasn't changed the way I play. For me, I don't think I need to adjust my game depending on who I play with," said Ehlers, who had 25 goals and 58 points in 71 games last season. "I play my best hockey when I play as a shooter. You're going to make your plays but I play faster, I skate more when I play with that shooter's mentality. I felt I did well last year. I want to be doing more, honestly. So it's something that I'm working on and, yeah, it's going to be good."

But by his own admission, Jets head coach Paul Maurice hinted that it was safe to put some additional stock into how things are currently constructed.

After all, the Jets open the season against the Calgary Flames in seven days.

As Maurice likes to say, nothing is permanent. He can go back to the proverbial well if he needs to.

Besides, for the Jets to achieve success, both Connor and Ehlers are going to need to be key contributors, no matter what line they're playing on.

This isn't an either/or scenario.

It's going to be up to Maurice to create the combinations that will provide enough headaches for opposing coaches and players. Finding a match-up to exploit is something every bench boss is looking for.

"I would agree that I don't think it's as easy to sort out and I think what you do sometimes when you play against teams that have two powerful offensive lines, you certainly go into the game with an idea, then you've got to judge real quick which one's going," said Maurice. "Because on every night there's usually one line that's got a little more jump than the others and I think it'll be interesting to watch to see how that's matched. But I don't know on an offensive output that you can pick which one's going to score more goals yet."

Ehlers adopted a shooter's mentality last season and was on pace for his first 30-goal season of his career when the pause arrived in March. He followed that up by exorcising his playoff demons, erasing a 22-game goal-scoring drought.

Although the Jets were quickly dispatched in four games by the Flames, Ehlers lived up to the prophetic words that it was only a matter of time before the regular season success extended to the post-season.

The reward?

Getting the first crack at earning a more regular spot riding shotgun with Scheifele and Wheeler.

"When you play on that line, you're going to draw an awful lot of firepower, so you can't just be good at one end of the rink," said Maurice. "Nikolaj has made developments in his defensive game. He's just older, right? He's got more experience now. He understands how important it is in the defensive zone and what you do with the puck in the offensive zone and your risk profile. All of those things young players never think about before they get to the NHL and they're all critical pieces. Who you're playing against, the D you're playing against."

"He's a more mature person, a more mature player and I would say — and his numbers would say — that he's earned the right to play against the other team's best. It's going to be a big challenge for him. This is another phase in Nikolaj's development."

Remaining Time -1:26

Maurice explains decision to move Ehlers to Jets' top line

Ehlers' speed in transition is an extraordinary weapon and there are times when he plays the role of a one-man zone entry.

As for Connor, this isn't a demotion in the truest sense of the word.

Not even close.

There won't be a negligible difference when it comes to ice time and he's playing alongside a sniper with vision in Patrik Laine and a dependable two-way centre in Paul Stastny who is known for making his linemates better.

Connor didn't need a pep talk when he saw who he was playing with at the start of camp.

"You would if the personality dictated that you had to. But no, not with Kyle. He really doesn't necessarily care who he plays with, it's not an issue for him," said Maurice. "So I told him what line he was going on and he said, 'Hey, that's great.' And that was it."

"Part of that is my experience with Kyle Connor over the last few years. You didn't have to explain stuff to him. He just wants to go out and play and he'll figure it out."

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

Connor has the type of soft hands and finishing ability that has some pundits wondering if he might be in the running for a Rocket Richard Trophy one day.

"When that happens, I'm not sure. When that breakthrough where everybody realizes that this guy is so very, very dangerous," said Maurice. "If you were to come and watch the first four days of our training camp, you would say it's coming soon."

"He's got such a quiet personality about him but he's driven to score goals. Wants to be a good player. Incredibly fit. He's wired into being a great player and he's going to get there."

Of his 38 goals last season, seven of them were game-winners (including one in overtime) and nine of them came on the power play.

"I see myself taking another stride as a player," said Connor, who had 73 points in 71 games last season to finish in a tie for 15th in the NHL with Scheifele. "Personally, I don't really set goals for how many points, goals, assists that I want from a particular year. I just focus day in, day out on trying to get better every single day. For me, that's when I have the most success. I think I can take another step this year."

The Jets are counting on Connor and Ehlers to take another step this season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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And the reality is that the internal competition is likely to push both of these dynamic players to even greater heights — no matter how the situation eventually plays out.

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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.

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

Iain MacIntyre@imacSportsnet

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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 sparkled 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.

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.

But he surrendered only one goal the rest of the way and Holtby sprinkled in some strong saves throughout. So important was this prep work that each goalie played the entire scrimmage. All they really need is a couple of NHL exhibition games apiece. But all they're going to get is

one more serious scrimmage. Ready or not, here comes the regular season.

College-hockey free agent acquisition Marc Michaelis, a 25-year-old rookie who played this fall in his native Germany, made a deft pass to send Sven Baertschi in on a breakaway and continues to show a skilful, nuanced game ... Olli Juolevi, the presumptive sixth defenceman, seems to be getting stronger by the day ... The top blue-line pairing of Alex Edler with Nate Schmidt struggled in their own zone at times ... Quinn Hughes so thoroughly beat Holtby on a penalty shot, he should be a candidate for shootouts this season ... The top line of Pettersson, J.T. Miller and Brock Boeser looks flat-out ready to go.

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 Bantree, 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



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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.

“They seem to have a pretty high profile already,” he said of Pettersson and Hughes, Calder Trophy winner and runner-up. “And I don’t think either one of them really cares how high their profile is. They’re both humble guys. They know those type of things come with being a good hockey player, especially in Canada.”

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1198258 Websites

Matthews to see time on Maple Leafs’ penalty kill

By Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto Reporter Kristen Shilton reports on the Maple Leafs, who held team meetings on a recovery day at Ford Performance Centre on Thursday.

Auston Matthews has grown into the Maple Leafs’ best offensive player, and now head coach Sheldon Keefe wants to tap even more into his defensive game. Matthews will appear this season on Toronto’s penalty kill for the first time in his career.

“We don’t expect it to be any sort of full-time role or responsibility, but on a part-time basis as needed,” Keefe explained on a Zoom call with reporters Thursday. “We want to start getting him comfortable with those situations and faceoffs in particular is an area where he can bring a lot to us on the left side. We’ve seen so much in his growth as a defensive player that we believe he can bring a lot to the penalty kill, and obviously the offensive threat that he is on the ice, in addition to some of our other penalty killers, brings a lot, too. So we’re going to start to get him some minutes in that regard.”

It wasn’t that long ago, in September 2019, that former Leafs coach Mike Babcock said that when he approached Matthews about potentially killing penalties, the centre basically told him that, “I have never done it, and I don’t plan on doing it.”

Assuming Matthews is now on board (he was not made available to the media on Thursday), having his skill set more involved in the Leafs’ special teams could be a positive. Matthews was 55 per cent in the dot last season, while the Leafs ranked 24th in penalty kill faceoffs and 21st overall shorthanded (77.7 per cent).

From Keefe’s perspective, adding Matthews to the mix there can only help his star continue to rise and establish him as one of the league’s best two-way forwards.

“I don’t think you can put any sort of ceiling or limit on a player like that,” Keefe said. “Because of his abilities and his drive, that’s why we just continue to add layers to his responsibilities. It’s exciting to watch, and I know he’s very committed to being great in all regards and we believe he has the tools to do that. He’s shown the ability and willingness to put in the work. So we’ve got to continue to add layers to it, and give him opportunities to affect the game in more ways than just scoring goals.”

Other forwards who will kill penalties for the Leafs to start the season include Mitch Marner, Zach Hyman, Alex Kerfoot, Ilya Mikheyev and Jason Spezza.

No matter what John Tavares accomplishes personally each season, he measures the success of every campaign by its eventual outcome:

“Expectations are always the same: The goal is always to win the Stanley Cup.”

Suffice it to say, the Leafs failed to reach that level last season, and Tavares himself fell short of the career-best numbers he managed in 2018-19. Through a shortened 2019-20, Tavares ranked 38th in the NHL with 60 points in 63 games and was 28th in goals (26).

By comparison, he was third overall in goals the year before (with 47) and 16th in points (88), offering a benchmark for Tavares to aim at getting back to in the season to come. Tavares said the first step towards that has been setting the right focus.

“I think we’re all still living with the disappointment of last season,” Tavares said. “There was so many ups and downs, so many different things that we went through...and then the long off-season was just a lot of time to reflect on that and learn from that experience and build yourself back up to the things you’re trying to work on and the habits that you’re focusing on. To think about [the Cup] in the big picture every day can be a little bit difficult, so it’s more just trying to continue to understand how we need to get through the adjustments and the improvements that need to be made.”

Tavares has started out this training camp on a line with William Nylander and newcomer Jimmy Vesey, a unit that hasn’t yet found its groove as a whole.

“[John’s] done a really good job of working with Jimmy Vesey especially who hasn’t been here and [is] getting him comfortable,” Keefe said. “I’ve liked that line from what we’ve seen from an individual standpoint, but I think we still need to see more time for it to come together cohesively amongst the three of them.”

Whether it’s helping to guide Vesey or keeping up with Keefe’s tough on-ice training program, Tavares seems to be setting a very particular tone for Toronto.

“What I like about John is it’s very clear that he is prepared for the season in a big way,” Keefe said. “To me he looks in incredible shape. We had a very challenging day here on day one especially, with the skating and the way we started the training camp with the conditioning skate, and he was as strong as anybody right to the very end. And that was really great to see, and he’s maintained that throughout three tough days. I think he is extremely focused and committed to helping lead our team to success.”

In a normal year, the Leafs might play up to eight exhibition games before the regular season got rolling. Ahead of this 56-game slate though, there will be no official tune-ups at all, so Keefe has manufactured a preseason game of his own on Saturday for players to get acclimated before Wednesday’s opener.

“We’re going to essentially replicate a game-day type setting for us. We’ll come in in the morning and have a morning skate for the guys, a light practice, and then send them on their way and come back in the evening for at 7 p.m. for a Blue and White game,” Keefe said of Saturday’s schedule.

“We’re expecting that to be as close as we can get to an exhibition game, with our meeting times and all of the procedures we would typically go through in our preparations for any game.”

For most players, the lack of preseason contests is a welcome change. Given there aren’t many open roster spots to battle for this year, Keefe isn’t too concerned that a makeshift exhibition tilt is all the Leafs will have to build off.

“When you’re making up the fringes of your team, when you have new incoming players that are pushing for jobs, I think a longer exhibition allows time for those kind of things to play out,” Keefe said. “I think as you break it down for the individual players that are established in the league, they probably don’t need more than a couple to be ready to go.”



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Morgan Rielly wholeheartedly agreed, saying he had “mixed feelings” about exhibition games in the past and certainly isn’t lamenting their absence this time around.

“I think you just have to take what you can get right now,” he said. “We played a game against each other yesterday [during an intra-squad scrimmage], and we’re going to play again in a couple days. So, I think that’s lots and I think we’ll be ready to go.”

If nothing else, Keefe hopes the Leafs can use Saturday’s game to get in the right headspace for a new year and carry it well into next week’s opening slate.

“It’s more on how the players respond and how they recognize the urgency of a regular season, and if they can dial it in,” Keefe said. “And I think it really is as much a mindset, more so than it is the teaching or any of those type of things, so that’s really what remains to be seen [without exhibition] but I think our expectation is that we’re going to have to get that stuff going and to execute at a high level right from the start.”

Since beginning their on-ice work at training camp on Monday, the Leafs have either worked at 5-on-5 or scrimmaged. That’s all about to change when they return to practice on Friday though, as Thursday’s day of meetings made clear.

“We came in [today] and really set the foundation for our special teams,” Keefe shared. “That will take up the bulk of our day tomorrow on the ice and really each day forward, we’ll be working on our special teams. We’ve kept the focus on five-on-five play and the pace and the competitiveness that we needed to see. But now we’re essentially in the next phase, working with special teams and then gearing more towards next week.”

That shift brings assistant coach Manny Malhotra into the spotlight. He was hired last summer to replace departing power play coach Paul McFarland, and Keefe gave him the floor on Thursday.

“Specific to the power play, [Manny] is coming here with a very organized and well-researched plan,” Keefe said. “Both on our team and what we’ve been through the last number of years, and what the incoming players can provide and what their skill sets are and what the trends are around the league to help formulate a plan. It was great to see him present today and spend time with each individual player that’s going to be on the power play to begin with, giving them a plan and getting their ideas as well.”

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1198259 Websites

Average defence enough to make Oilers contenders in North Division

By Travis Yost

We expect a wild 56-game sprint in the all-Canadian division, alternatively known as the Scotia NHL North Division. If you believe the betting markets, it’s the Toronto Maple Leafs’ division to lose.

The Maple Leafs may have the deepest roster in the division and seem like a playoff lock, but I’m not as convinced as the betting markets are (37 per cent implied probability) that they will end up on top.

It remains to be seen if their defensive issues – substandard off-puck play from the blueline, and a shaky Frederik Andersen season – have been sorted out. These same defensive issues made them indiscernible from the likes of the Winnipeg Jets and Vancouver Canucks in the standings last season – by win/loss record and goal differentials alike.

But if we have reservations about Toronto’s defensive prowess, then we have outright concerns about every other roster in the division. Finding a reason to disbelieve Toronto is just as hard as finding a reason to believe in another Canadian club.

The Canadiens are returning an abysmal power play. The Oilers goaltending situation is of concern. The Canucks had to purge some depth from a lineup that was getting just 48 per cent of expected goals in the first place. The Jets seem to enjoy making life difficult for Connor Hellebuyck. The Flames had to burn through valuable cap space in order to shore up an untenable goaltending situation. The Senators are clearly still rebuilding.

The one team I keep coming back to as the presumptive challenger is the Oilers, for two reasons. The first is that I thought the front office had a quality off-season, ensuring depth forward positions that have killed this club for years would be filled by the likes of Kyle Turris, Tyler Ennis, Jesse Puljujarvi, and Dominik Kahun.

The second is I suspect we haven’t seen anything close to the performance ceiling for Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, and that is a terrifying thought.

How can that be said of two players who already have three Art Ross trophies and two Hart Memorial trophies, and are considered two of the most dangerous attackers the league has to offer? The short answer is because for as dominant as both of these guys have been, the hardware recognition has generally been for their offensive contributions (which have been otherworldly). But their net impact has been sharply marginalized, in large part because of woeful defensive numbers.

How much of this falls on Draisaitl and McDavid versus the blueline and goaltending is certainly up for debate, but it has sharply reduced their overall effectiveness. If we compare Edmonton’s super duo to other Canadian stars over the past couple of seasons, you can see the type of diminishing returns they are seeing:

Compared to a random sampling of other high-impact forwards around the all-Canadian division, two things stand out: Draisaitl and McDavid are magicians at generating in the offensive end, and based on their respective point totals, we know that they do the lion’s share of the heavy lifting when it comes to playmaking and goal scoring. It is quite fair to say that they carry a uniquely heavy burden to generate offence for their team, and they do so both at even strength and on the power play.

The second thing that stands out is just how much of their offensive production is marginalized because their opponents also can score at will. Compare McDavid and Draisaitl to Elias Pettersson in Vancouver. Pettersson isn’t as effective offensively, but the Canucks have been much more capable slowing offensive pressure than the Oilers in recent years. That’s why Pettersson has made Vancouver 0.7 goals better than their opponents every 60 minutes of play over the past two seasons; for McDavid and Draisaitl, it’s barely above break-even.

Pettersson, of course, has enjoyed playing with talented two-way defensive wingers and a sharp goaltender in the form of Jacob Markstrom. But this is the biggest reason why you are seeing quotes from McDavid in training camp about the importance of keeping pucks out of their net.

If the Oilers can sharpen their defensive play across the board it’s going to pay serious dividends in the standings, and we will ultimately end up rethinking how dangerous Edmonton’s top units are.

Even average defensive results would turn the top half of the Oilers lineup into a juggernaut, as opposed to a truly scary offensive team that’s going to give you those goals right back over the course of games.

To that end, if you are looking for one team to carry the baton as the Maple Leafs biggest challenger, you could do a lot worse than this Edmonton team.

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Hoglander boosting chances as Canucks scrimmage

By Jeff Paterson

Rookie Nils Hoglander certainly boosted his chances of cracking the Vancouver Canucks opening night line-up with a stellar performance in Wednesday night's scrimmage at Rogers Arena.

After setting up linemate Bo Horvat for a first period goal, Hoglander netted the game winner in the third leading his Team White to a 6-4 victory over Team Blue. Beyond the two-point performance, the 20-year-old exhibited a strong work rate throughout the hockey game including stripping Elias Pettersson of the puck in a one-on-one board battle late in the game. Hoglander has looked comfortable from the first day of camp skating on right wing with Horvat and Tanner Pearson. That's where he spent the bulk of Wednesday night, although his goal was the result of a pretty give and go with Antoine Roussel.

Will Lockwood scored twice in the first period helping Team Blue jump out to a 3-0 lead, before White rattled off four straight to take a second period lead including a penalty shot goal by Quinn Hughes. JT Miller tied the game 4-4 before the end of the second period. The veteran winger converted a Pettersson pass with a lethal one-time slapshot under the crossbar from the right face-off dot.

Other Team White goal-scorers included Horvat with a pair, Sven Baertschi and Zack MacEwen into an empty net while Tyler Graovac had Team Blue's other goal.

Thatcher Demko picked up the victory while Braden Holtby took the loss. Both goalies went the distance in the 60-minute game that featured NHL officials using the night as their own tune-up with no exhibition games to work this season.

Marc Michaelis continues to show well in his first NHL camp. On a line with Sven Baertschi and Justin Bailey, the German centre has good mobility and shows poise with the puck. A consistent point producer in four years at NCAA Minnesota State-Mankato, the free agent has put his skill on display through the first three days and two scrimmage games. Listed at 5'10", he doesn't shy away from the middle of the ice and seemed to be around the puck a lot on Wednesday night.

Olli Juolevi turned in a solid performance in the scrimmage. Playing on the winning side, he was paired primarily with Tyler Myers as he has been through the first couple days of drills. Although with seven defensemen dressed on each team, there was a significant amount of mix and match on both bluelines. Juolevi has shown a comfort level throughout camp that was also on display last summer. He has certainly polished his game to the level that he now looks like he belongs at this level. There has been nothing through three days of camp that would suggest Juolevi won't be the third pair left side defenseman when the Canucks open the season next week.

Brogan Rafferty showed flashes of the puck-moving ability that allowed him to produce 45 points in 57 games in the American Hockey League last season. Paired with Josh Teves for most of this camp -- and again on Wednesday night -- Rafferty clearly has noticeable offensive instincts. However, he was bounced to the ice by Jake Virtanen on one of the few hits thrown on the night. Other physical battles included Jayce Hawryluk and Jack Rathbone and Utica teammates Justin Bailey and Guillaume Brisebois who engaged in a spirited tussle for space in front of the net on one second period sequence.

It was a quiet night for veterans Brandon Sutter, Adam Gaudette and Tyler Motte. And outside of his empty netter, Zach MacEwen didn't leave much of a mark on the game. Loui Eriksson and Jay Beagle set-up linemate Will Lockwood for the first of his two goals on the night.

Thatcher Demko made the save of the night early in the hockey game when he denied Nate Schmidt with a spectacular right pad save. Schmidt was the trailer on a Brock Boeser opportunity off the rush. The rebound squirted to the on-coming defenseman and Demko read the play well and flashed his pad to prevent Schmidt from opening the scoring.

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USA TODAY / He's back: NJ Devils sign Sami Vatanen to one-year contract to shore up defense unit

Sean Farrell

NorthJersey.com

The New Jersey Devils have welcomed back an old friend on the blueline.

Defenseman Sami Vatanen is returning to the team after signing a one-year, \$2 million deal on Thursday.

Vatanen, 29, spent the last three seasons with the Devils before being shipped to Carolina at the Trade Deadline. In that deal, the Devils received forward Janne Kuokkanen, defenseman Fredrik Claesson and a conditional pick they used to take Nico Daws. That move is already starting to pay off since Kuokkanen is fighting to make the team out of training camp.

Bringing back Vatanen will give the Devils some depth and versatility, though it's unclear how soon he'll be able to join the team.

"He's another veteran guy who we can put inside our dressing room that knows how to play the game the right way," coach Lindy Ruff said.

"Competes at a very high level, great teammate, just another good NHL defenseman for us. So it's a real good acquisition."

During his time with the Devils, Vatanen was one of the team leaders in minutes and became a focal point on the power play. He scored 68 points (12 goals, 56 assists) in 154 games with New Jersey after coming over in the Adam Henrique trade.

The Devils now have a surplus of defensemen on the right side with Vatanen joining Damon Severson, P.K. Subban and Connor Carrick.

The rotation on the left includes Ryan Murray, Will Butcher, Ty Smith and Dmitry Kulikov.

"We know there's going to be injuries," Ruff said. "You could as a team end up with a COVID-related absense. I think as a team, we're trying to protect ourselves so we've got a guy that is NHL caliber."

Ruff said he doesn't know when Vatanen will be available since the Finnish defenseman will need to travel to New Jersey and quarantine. The Devils begin the season at home next Thursday against the Boston Bruins.

"The fanbase should be extremely excited about what's coming down the pipeline here," general manager Tom Fitzgerald said last week. "In the meantime, this team is going to be very competitive. We're going to compete every single night."

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