



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE ATHLETIC

2021 NHL Goalie Tiers: Anonymous panel of GMs and coaches rates all 31 starters

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One of the panelists for our annual Goalie Tiers project floated a theory.

In a condensed season, like 2020-21, having a starting goalie who can handle a heavy workload will be more important than ever. We'll hear a lot publicly about two-goalie systems and the importance of having a strong backup, but when push comes to shove, it's going to be about No. 1. There's just too much on the line in each game.

"Being robust as a starter during this year is going to be critical," said one NHL coach. "What happens on a back-to-back when Connor Hellebuyck pitches a shutout in Edmonton and they play the next night in Edmonton? You're fucking right: He's going to play again."

And that means, contrary to what many expect, that having a top-tier goalie may be more important than ever in this shortened season.

And who might those top-tier goalies be? Or maybe more importantly, who isn't?

Welcome to the 2021 Goalie Tiers.

If you're unfamiliar, every year we ask a group of NHL general managers and coaches to rate every single starting goalie on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being best and five being worst. Then the ratings are averaged and the goalies sorted into tiers. We grant anonymity to encourage honesty and participation.

This year, the panel was made up of six general managers, four head coaches and five goalie coaches.

Let's dive in:

Tier 1

1. Andrei Vasilevskiy, Lightning

Average 2021 tier rating: 1.03

For the third consecutive season, Vasilevskiy is at the top of this list. He's the best goalie in the league, and it might not be close. Asked to rate him on a 1 to 5 scale with one being best, one GM quipped: "Zero? I think he's the best. If you can find someone better, let me know."

"He has no weakness," said a head coach. "He's got unbelievable size, athleticism, work ethic and focus. ... He's perfected his craft."

Vasilevskiy got ones across the board. Except a single panelist who gave him a 1.5. His average rating of 1.03 was the lowest since Carey Price got ones across the board for a perfect 1.0 in 2016.

"What can you say bad about him? Start off with the way he handles the puck. He's engaged in the game from the start. He can handle the puck for a big guy. Two, he's aggressive. He's not a big guy who plays in the paint and is conservative,"

said a coach. "You add that other element of flexibility and athleticism and his compete to keep the puck out of the net — he understands what his job is. It's not to look pretty all the time. His hockey awareness of where the puck is is incredible. That's why he's the best in the league. Now that he's done it, it's a hard title to take away."

"You knew at some point, he was going to win a Cup, and I don't think he's done yet," said a goalie coach. "When you get a guy that big who can move and who competes like he does — his puck handling has gotten so much better. You've seen this guy mature. He's 26 now, and he has a lot of good hockey left in front of him."

On top of winning a Stanley Cup, Vasilevskiy hasn't finished lower than third in Vezina voting the past three seasons. While wins may not be the best stat to measure goalies, he's led the league in wins each of the last three seasons. He's a workhorse.

Did we mention he's still just 26?

"I'd put him in a class by himself," concluded a coach.

2 (tie). Connor Hellebuyck, Jets

Average 2021 tier rating: 1.27

He was great last year for the Jets. He beat out Tuukka Rask and Andrei Vasilevskiy for the Vezina. He's catapulted himself to the top of the U.S. Olympic goalie conversation. He led the league in shutouts and saw more shots than any other goalie in the league while finishing with a save percentage of .922. As you might expect, the panel was nearly unanimous in its praise.

"I would want him to play for my team anytime," said a coach.

"I like him," said another. "He plays heavy minutes. ... I don't think there's anybody who plays more in the league. That team, they open it up a little bit. It's not like it's St. Louis or Dallas defensively. Last year was a statement year for him."

But if you ask enough people about goalies, you almost always find a dissenting opinion.

"He's one of those guys who is really good on a bad team," said one panelist. "I just haven't seen it yet where the money is on the line and he's a gamer. Last year was a disaster in Winnipeg. Fuck, he did a great job keeping them in games. The mindset was, 'Hey, there's no pressure. Just keep us in this one.' If you're going to throw around the word Vezina, that's not a Vezina winner for me. ... He did let in clear-sighted goals a fair amount. I think his rebound control is poor. He does a lot of things that are good, but a Vezina winner is the best goalie in the world."

2 (tie). Carey Price, Canadiens

Average 2021 tier rating: 1.27

Price finished last season with a .909 save percentage, well under his career .917 average. Over the past three regular



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seasons (in 115 games), Price has a .910 save percentage. His numbers are starting to slide as he gets into his 30s but not his reputation inside the game. That he was great in the bubble only solidified his place amongst GMs and coaches.

This exchange with an Eastern Conference GM was typical.

“Carey Price.”

“One.”

“Any hesitation?”

“No.”

People in the game continue to love Carey Price.

“He just looks like he’s going to stop the puck,” said a coach.

“All I know is if I could pick any goalie to start a game, I’d pick Andrei Vasilevskiy one and Price two,” said another head coach. “When your stock is that high and you’re not on a great team, people want to knock you down.”

Said one more head coach: “Until somebody shows me different, he’s a one.”

The goalie coaches tended to be a little more critical of Price. They still liked him and respected him, but they definitely were tougher on him.

“The team has gotten worse, so he’s been let off the hook a little bit,” said one. “Carey Price is a really good, pretty good, goalie to watch who is elite at his craft. He’s also never been able to get done what people hope he can get done.”

He continued.

“Every goalie school across the world has clips. If you could build a goalie, that’s what it looks like. No one knows what to do with Carey Price. You understand not one guy can take a team on a Cup run. It takes way more than that. Things just have never aligned up for him in Montreal.”

Another goalie coach gave him a high rating but said he would have been a three had he not made adjustments for the playoffs.

“He made some changes over the break, you could tell,” he said. “If he plays that way — the way he played in the playoffs based on some of the changes that it looked like he made — we obviously know the skill he brings to the table and how easy the game comes to him. He was at a different level in the playoffs.”

Tier 2

4. Tuukka Rask, Bruins

Average 2021 tier rating: 1.67

Rask is entering the final year of his contract with the Bruins, so this becomes a pivotal season for him and his future. He has provided context for his decision to leave the bubble, and that should help take heat off him.

“I think he’ll flourish this year playing in front of no fans in Boston,” joked one panelist about the scrutiny he always seems to be under in that market.

At 32 years old, the 2014 Vezina winner finished second in voting last season and is going to go down as one of the best

goalies of his era. His .929 save percentage last year was up from his career average of .922.

“I’m a huge, huge fan. I think he’s fucking unreal,” said one coach.

“Over the years, other than Vasilevskiy, Tuukka Rask has been the most consistent. His style is so rock-solid in his play,” said a goalie coach. “He’s had some great playoffs. His opt-out might have eaten him up a little bit, but even at his age he can have a bad night and still rely on his foundation. He’s one of the best looking goalies in the NHL. Just the consistency is pretty amazing.”

Said another coach: “He’s still getting it done ... and the two goalie system: (Jaroslav) Halak has played a lot the last two years and has taken the added pressure and burden off Rask. I’m still a fan of his.”

5. Jacob Markstrom, Flames
Average 2021 tier rating: 1.97

Markstrom is an interesting one. He’s 30 years old. He’s coming off the best season of his career. He carried the Vancouver Canucks at times. He has continually improved during his decade in the league. Last year, for instance, he was No. 22 on this list.

“He’s come a long way too,” said a head coach. “He’s fucking quality.”

But now he’s switching teams. And the success he had under a demanding goalie coach in Vancouver needs to transfer to a new city in a new organization under the pressure of a big contract.

One panelist articulated that concern: “What I know about (Canucks goaltending coach) Ian Clark: Everywhere he goes, things turn to gold. ... The guy gets results out of his goalies. He has a lot of confidence in his work.”

He explained that Clark, who coaches with a bit of an edge, started working with Markstrom at the perfect time, when he was receptive to coaching, and he wondered if he was quite ready to go on his own.

“I’d feel better if Markstrom moved to Calgary in three more years,” he said.

Another goalie coach acknowledged the challenge of the franchise change and the severing of that relationship with Clark but anticipated it going well.

“It’s a big year. He has to show who he is. He has great compete, and Ian is great. He’s stern. He does a really good job of managing them when they need days off. (Markstrom) bought into his style. He’ll be fine, but it’s going to be different.”

6. Carter Hart, Flyers

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.00

There wasn’t much debate from the panel over whether Hart is trending up, even if he saw a slight dip in his save percentage. The bigger debate centered on what exactly he is right now. Or what he’ll be this season.

In the minds of some panelists, he’s already there. He received three votes for Tier 1 from the panel — people who



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already think he's a top-tier goalie. But there are still those who want more time to assess.

"He's going to be a (Tier) 1," said a goalie coach. "We're going to have a discussion in two or three years that he's a 1. He still has a lot to improve."

Added a head coach: "I like Carter. I like him. It's a little bit ... wait and see. I think he's going to be really good."

So what does he already do well at age 22? Other than being able to handle the pressure of playing for a franchise where goalies have historically struggled, Hart's style should lend itself to consistency as he matures.

"He is one of the most efficient goalies in the league, the way he tracks, the way he moves. I just think, physically, he's as skilled as you can get," said a goalie coach. "There's going to be part of it between the ears that's going to be the determining factor of how consistent he'll be. He can shut you down, and it's fairly simple for him. He's a modern guy who has grown up in a way that is more efficient than guys (who came before him)."

A few panelists brought up Hart's struggles on the road as something that needs to be improved moving forward. Last season, Hart was 20-3-2 with a .943 save percentage at home. He was 4-10-1 with a .857 save percentage on the road.

"He was horrendous on the road," said a panelist. "He cannot play on the road right now. He's got to figure that part out. He's very well versed on the psychological aspect of hockey and life. He's a man of routine. He gets himself into a pregame rhythm. I just don't know if he's found out how to do that at the NHL level (on the road)."

7. John Gibson, Ducks

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.03

We're going to jump to the most interesting opinion here, because most panelists really like John Gibson and think he's an upper-echelon goalie. But one, who gave him a 3.5 rating (tied for his lowest), explained why we might be seeing the downward arc of his career.

"I don't see him working at his craft. I don't see parts of his game that have really gotten better," this panelist said. "There are older guys in the league — look at Jacob Markstrom. His game has changed quite a bit. Even a guy like Freddie Andersen has made adjustments. I feel like Gibson is collecting his paycheck. Would that be different if they had a better team in front of him?... I'm hard on him because I feel like he could be so much more."

A GM countered that opinion.

"I disagree," he said. "I see John Gibson play with my own two eyes. He didn't have a good year last year, but he's a very good goalie."

But a goalie coach, who likes Gibson, echoed the notion that his style may be dated.

"I see his numbers every year, and they're unbelievable, but you look at his style from a goalie coach's point of view — he has a touch of old school to him," he said. "It's not pretty. There

are certain parts of his game I don't trust. But I give him credit: He's a workhorse who can handle the load."

Said another: "Put him on a good team and he could be a top guy."

8. Sergei Bobrovsky, Panthers

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.10

Last year, Bobrovsky received the highest rating of his career. It seemed like he'd finally won over the league and earned universal respect. Then came Year No. 1 with the Panthers. It didn't go well.

"He had a terrible year," said one GM.

Another GM said he had a hard time disconnecting his inflated salary (\$10 million per season for six more years) from his analysis when assessing Bobrovsky.

But even at half the price, a .900 save percentage in 48 starts isn't particularly good. So it all comes down to whether you think he bounces back in Florida, away from the structure and comfort zone of the Blue Jackets.

He definitely has his defenders. One panelist who knows him well predicted a big season. Another said Bobrovsky played much better down the stretch after showing an inability to "catch up to the style of play" of the Panthers.

"I think he'll bounce back," said a Western Conference GM.

But a detailed assessment from a goalie coach suggested that Bobrovsky's style of play may never perfectly mesh with the Panthers system.

"The problem with Bob is there is a compound effect in Florida where they give up the middle of the ice a lot and he's not a great lateral mover. In the highlights, you see him making saves in the splits when the reality is, if Carey Price was in the same system, he'd be making the saves with his chest," the coach said. "People are saying Bob had an off year — question is: Did he? He comes from Columbus, where the system really matched his gameplay there. I'm concerned his weakness, lateral movement, is open. We might have a bad match there."

9. Robin Lehner, Golden Knights

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.13

Lehner will be starting the season on his fourth different team in four years, but by virtue of a five-year deal worth \$5 million per season, he finally has a chance to establish himself with one franchise and give his career some stability.

"I love that kid's story, and he's always in the way of the puck too," said one head coach.

A couple of panelists brought up the fact that Lehner has only started more than 50 games once in his career so there's some question if he can be a long-term workhorse in Vegas, but with Marc-Andre Fleury still around, he doesn't have to be. Most people liked the fit between the Golden Knights and Lehner.

"Good goalie on a good team," said one goalie coach.



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"I think he'll be happy with the fact that he has a long-term deal," said another. "He fit in well with the team. They've got good structure, a good group. He's a very honest person, and sometimes that can rub people the wrong way, but I think he'll do well. I don't know if I see him as a Vezina guy, but I think he could be."

On the flip side, there were some slight concerns.

"His puck handling is atrocious," said a panelist. "He's the worst shootout goalie in the league. I think he got protected really well. ... For me, he's still above average, but I want to see him win."

"His style is so sloppy at times. He's not a clean Carey Price-type of goalie," said another. "Robin likes to play his way. He'll drop his knee to the ice on a shot from the blue line. He's got that old-school style to him sometimes. But it works. The guy battles his ass off. He's a competitor."

10 (tie). Frederik Andersen, Maple Leafs

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.17

For a few years now, Andersen has been a goalie that panelists fly right by, mostly giving him a two rating before moving on to the next goalie. They're confident he's better than average but not convinced he's a Vezina candidate. Just about the perfect Tier 2 goalie. But this year, there was a lot of Andersen love from the group.

"I think he's an impact player on that team. I just think he's really good. I just think that when I look at his skills, when he's at his best, he's a top guy in the league," said one coach. "He might not get it because at times they give up some stuff that makes it hard. He's pretty consistent."

An Eastern Conference head coach was even more adamant about Andersen's place in the game.

"I don't understand all the hate. I don't get it. I don't understand all the negativity towards him. It's like anything in life, the playoffs. I get it. You have to win," he said. "It gets overamplified. He's a hell of a goalie. Night in and night out. He's huge. They don't play great D. They don't have this great D-corps. You throw him on Columbus, and his numbers would be unbelievable."

"Any goalie who has played in Toronto — (Felix) Potvin, (Ed) Belfour, (Andrew) Raycroft, go down the list — no matter what they do there, they get run out of town," said another panelist. "Andersen is a steady goalie. He can play a shit ton of games. He's a workhorse. I don't see him as a guy who will win the Vezina, but I see him better than an average goalie. If you put in an average goalie in Toronto, he wouldn't do what Freddy does."

And if you're just looking for the bottom line, here's another coach: "Contract year. The team will be better. He's going to have a big year."

10 (tie). Darcy Kuemper, Coyotes

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.17

For two seasons, Kuemper has been legitimately great in Arizona. He has a .923 save percentage in 94 games since joining the Coyotes in the 2017-18 season.

"His stats say he's a (Tier) 1," said a head coach.

And yet, there was definitely hesitation to put him in that bracket.

"That is an interesting one. Fuck. I don't know," said another head coach when asked to rate Kuemper. Most seemed comfortable giving him a two and moving right on to the next goalie.

One panelist also felt the condensed season would present a real challenge to Kuemper's continued success.

"To me, Darcy Kuemper is in trouble," he said. "He's got to be healthy for 70 percent of the starts, and that's not a good recipe for a guy like him who is injured often."

12. Igor Shesterkin, Rangers

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.23

So, this one was interesting. Typically, when people are asked to project or evaluate a 25-year-old goalie who's played 12 career NHL games, they want to see more before drawing conclusions. They are conservative in their assessment. But something about the way Shesterkin performed (.932 save percentage) in New York while replacing a Hall of Famer eliminated the normal reservations.

"He hasn't been overhyped," said a head coach. "Whenever I see him, I really, really like him. He's pretty damn good."

"He's the real deal," said another. "He came in under pressure. He's the young guy everyone is talking about, getting his chance."

"This kid walks down Broadway and says, 'See you later Lundqvist,'" said a panelist. "And pushes the other guy out of the way. Do we know a lot about him in the world of goaltending? Not a lot. What I do know is that on the mental side of things, he's done something very interesting. ... I'm very intrigued about this guy's mental game. He reminds me of the way (Vasilevskiy) came in and treated things when he came to Tampa. 'Move over. I'm coming through.' This guy, I don't know if he's exactly like that. His play will tell us that."

13 (tie). Jordan Binnington, Blues

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.33

Panelists still are having a hard time deciding exactly what they think of Binnington. They appreciate his performance in winning a Stanley Cup in 2019. They also remember the .851 save percentage in five games last year in the playoffs.

"He will be remembered for his bubble play," said one panelist, who added that he didn't want to put too much stock in such a small sample size. "I take that and throw it in the garbage."

"We're in a condensed season, and he's fighting for a contract," he said. "He's going to be dialed in. I'd expect a good year from him."

Not everyone is convinced.

"Jordan Binnington has always worried me," said a head coach. "He's been OK. I don't think he's better than that. At best, he's an OK starter."

13 (tie). Elvis Merzlikins, Blue Jackets



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Average 2021 tier rating: 2.33

Joonas Korpisalo got the nod in the playoffs and was incredible for the Blue Jackets in the bubble, finishing with a playoff-best .941 save percentage in nine games. He may end up with more starts. But Merzlikins is the wildcard of the two. When starting this exercise, the feeling was that his ceiling was higher and it might make for a more interesting analysis.

Like, for instance, this prediction from a panelist: "At some point, he'll win a Vezina."

While that might sound like a bold statement 33 games into his NHL career, Merzlikins finished fifth in Vezina voting last year. Sure, he only got two votes, but he clearly impressed people.

"I love that kid," said another panelist. "He has a lot of upside. It's tough because Korpisalo played so well in the playoffs. ... Merzlikins has the higher contract. He's got the size, the swagger. He has a lot of upside. His potential hasn't been tapped yet."

So which of the Columbus goalies would you pick?

"It's so tough when you talk about these guys who have only played like 30 games. But I'm going to go Merzlikins because he could be a franchise guy," said a coach. "He's very sure of himself. I can't tell you that I love his quotes in interviews — he wouldn't be my type of guy. The safer bet is Korpisalo. He's more mature. More games under his belt."

15. Semyon Varlamov, Islanders

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.37

Ilya Sorokin is the exciting new goalie for the Islanders, but Varlamov is the veteran incumbent, and his success during the playoffs (.921 save percentage in 20 games) suggests he's not going anywhere. And while it's easy to suggest that goalies playing for Barry Trotz get the benefit of a structured team in front of them, one panelist said Varlamov deserves credit for the success too.

"He saw more high-danger shots than I thought," he said. "He was in a good system, but he saw more than I thought."

Said another: "I'm not in love with him, but I like him a lot. ... He's actually much calmer in the net now. When you watch him, you think of Colorado and Washington days when he was athletic and low in his stance. Now he's calm and big at the top of the crease. I liked how he played all year."

More praise from a goalie coach.

"I liked his game a lot last year," he said. "His game technically was better — and I assume the system helps him and that D, but he did a nice job there. He was consistent. He's not over-the-top old, has pretty good athleticism and reactionary skill."

16. Ben Bishop, Stars

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.53

Bishop may not be the Stars starting goalie until late March, but he's on this list instead of Anton Khudobin because when he's healthy and dialed in, he's one of the best goalies in the league. The problem, as nearly every panelist pointed out, is that he isn't either often enough. It consistently hurt his ratings.

"The numbers say he's a (Tier) 1 all day long. The way he plays the puck is a huge advantage," said a GM. "If he wasn't hurt all the time, I think he'd have multiple Vezinas. When he's in the net, he's elite for me."

Rinse and repeat.

"He has great ability, but he's hurt. He always has something going on," said a head coach, echoing many others.

One goalie coach expressed concern that, this time, even when he's back it may be tough for Bishop to get going.

"I'm concerned about this injury," he said. "I like what he does as a big man, I'm just not sure it's going to be a good year for him."

Tier 3

17. Ilya Samsonov, Capitals

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.57

After missing time in the bubble with an upper-body injury, Samsonov stayed in D.C. to train. And with Henrik Lundqvist out, he will now shoulder heavy expectations for the Capitals this season. The No. 22 overall pick in the 2015 draft is talented but young (23 years old).

"He had a good year last year, but he leaked a little oil in the second half," said one panelist. "He had the injury, so there's uncertainty with that and how much he can play. I know they love him there. He was really good in the first half of last year."

Samsonov was outstanding in December and January but struggled in his last six starts before the pause. It's a small sample size, for sure.

"I'm concerned he's getting thrust into it a little too soon," said a goalie coach. "He's got to back it up. But he was really good on the penalty kill for them. That was something he did well."

Said another: "He's the same as Shesterkin. A young guy taking over. He could be a (Tier) 1 or 2 by the end of the year."

18. Mackenzie Blackwood, Devils

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.69

For the sake of transparency, this spot was initially Corey Crawford's, with the initial reporting done to get ratings on him. For those interested, Crawford averaged a 2.77 rating from the full panel.

But then on Saturday, Crawford announced his retirement in a move that will send the Devils scrambling to add depth to support Blackwood.

"Crawford to me is a Hall of Famer," said one of the head coaches. "He doesn't get enough credit."

To get a sense of how Blackwood compares, texts went out to a group of panelists for updated ratings on Blackwood. His average is based on those eight responses.

"I think Blackwood has a bright future," texted one goalie coach. "(I'd rate him higher) if he had a little stronger team in front of him."

Texted another coach about Blackwood: "Two. Soon to be one."



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And another: "I think this year there's gonna be a little bit more pressure on him, and losing that veteran presence as a partner could add some more, so I think it will be interesting how he handles it."

People like Blackwood. The challenge for the Devils is finding a goalie to take the pressure off the 24-year-old so he can continue to develop as an NHL starter without carrying too heavy of a burden. Crawford was just about the perfect goalie for that role.

"I think they like Mackenzie Blackwood a lot," said a GM. "I think they're trying to insulate him. In my opinion, Corey Crawford (increased) the chances of Mackenzie Blackwood being a good goalie."

19 (tie). Braden Holtby, Canucks

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.77

Thatcher Demko could easily end up playing the majority of the games for the Canucks, but with his two-year, \$8.6-million dollar deal, Holtby is the high-paid veteran brought in to replace Jacob Markstrom. And because of his experience and exposure, he's a goalie the panel would provide better context about.

"Here's the thing with Braden Holtby," one panelist started. "I don't love his style and how he plays sometimes. ... During the game, he's funky on his post. He handles the puck great. He has a little unorthodox style. Technically he does some old-school stuff. He lets in bad angle goals."

But then came the positive.

"In every single game, (he makes) a save that is game-changing," he continued. "He always finds one spectacular save in a game, and when you look at the time, look at the game, look at the situation, that is momentum changing. He's so good at competing."

In the goalie community, Vancouver goalie coach Ian Clark earned praise for his handling of Jacob Markstrom, and one coach suggested that the combination of Holtby's work ethic and Clark's coaching would create positive results in Vancouver.

"I think he's going to do well," he said. "He's a worker, such a good dude, and he's such a competitor. He's willing to get better and put the work in. With Ian Clark, they'll find a good partnership."

19 (tie). Tristan Jarry, Penguins

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.77

Jarry went from beating out Casey DeSmith for the backup job behind Matt Murray to removing Murray as the starter and finished with a .921 save percentage in 33 games. He got both Hart and Vezina votes. It was pretty impressive.

"The coaching staff and management is putting faith in him," said a panelist. "They still have good structure there, I think that helps him."

But how good is Jarry, really? There's not a great sample size at the NHL level, and the Penguins are putting a lot in his hands.

"He definitely was above average. He's not big. He handles the puck well," said a coach. "Very good puck handler. He brings that to the table."

Said another: "He was consistent in the American League for four years. It's always tougher to continue to do it year after year, but I think that the way he plays and the mentality and what his character is like, there's a level of consistency there that he can learn adjustments at the highest level. He's competitive. Guys love him. He's smart."

One more: "Pittsburgh played well in front of him. I'm nervous for him."

21. Philipp Grubauer, Avalanche

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.80

Health is always a factor when evaluating Grubauer, and many panelists were wary of rating him too high because of it. Grubauer has never played more than 37 games in a season, and he started this year's training camp unfit to play. But he also has a .920 save percentage for his career.

And the Avs need him on the ice.

"His mentality, he's built to be a No. 1," said a panelist. "He doesn't get too high or too low. He works. He's smart. Durability has been a bit of an issue the last couple years. ... You saw what happened to Colorado. Not having Grubauer hurt them."

Another panelist pointed out the difference he saw when Grubauer was in the lineup and wasn't for the Avs. On a star-studded team, he's a difference-maker.

"You look at that team and you look at their goalie numbers, he's done an amazing job there," the panelist said. "They lose him for the playoffs, and they were just hanging on. They needed to score six goals to win a game. They needed him. They're an offensive team, and he has been solid. You can't complain about him."

"He's a legit starting goalie," said a coach. "When he's at his best, he can be a top guy in the league."

22. Matt Murray, Senators

Average 2021 tier rating: 2.83

After five years with the Penguins (and a couple of Stanley Cups), Murray is now the No. 1 goalie in Ottawa, with healthy long-term contract to go with the scenery change. It's a solid bet by the Senators but not one without risk. Murray finished last season with an .899 save percentage and lost his starting job to Tristan Jarry.

"That's going to be an interesting one," said a goalie coach. "He's got something to prove. It'll be interesting to see how he handles being on a team that has struggled in the past and gives up a lot of opportunities. He's going to have to regain his game and stay healthy."

Said another coach: "Never discount those Cups he's got. You can't take those away. He has the moxie and he's a big stage goalie."

23 (tie). Juuse Saros, Predators

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.10



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For the first time since the advent of these goalie tiers in 2014, a goalie other than Pekka Rinne gets the evaluation for the Nashville Predators. Saros earns the edge here because of his play down the stretch for the Predators last season. He also was the goalie for the Predators during the postseason. The long transition from Rinne to Saros appears to be happening.

There were panelists who wondered if he was ready. Or even capable.

"I love Juuse Saros when he's in the Anton Khudobin role," said a GM. "When he's in the starter role, he looks like a little goalie after awhile. Pekka Rinne will be better this year."

"I'm not a fan, and it's not because of his size," said a coach. "I think he's been a good backup. He has to prove himself. He's been on a decent team for a long time. He's been handed the ball quite a few times. He's never taken the ball."

23 (tie). Linus Ullmark, Sabres

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.10

For a guy who is 27 years old and has never played in more than 37 games in his NHL career, the 6-foot-4 Swede received a sneaky high amount of love. Especially in the goalie-coaching community.

"I'm a fan. I like his style. I love his compete. He plays with an edge," said one. "Ullmark has paid his dues. He's going to surprise people. He can hold his team up this year."

"I've seen enough of him in Buffalo. He made some good improvements last year with (goalie coach Mike) Bales and his skill level with playing a little bit more conservative," said another. "He's going to be pretty consistent."

One more vote of confidence from a coach: "He's the better of their two goalies. I like him a lot. He's athletic. I think he's got a great future."

25. Cam Talbot, Wild

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.23

Talbot signed a three-year deal worth \$11 million in free agency to help upgrade a goaltending situation that wasn't great in Minnesota last year. If he replicates the .919 save percentage he posted last year with the Calgary Flames, things will be interesting with the Wild this season. Panelists seemed to think that might be a shade optimistic. People talking about Talbot tend to use descriptors like steady or solid or...

"He's adequate. I guess that's what I'd call him," said one GM. "He does improve their goaltending."

"It's a good fit," said a goalie coach. "Cam is a steady goalie. I don't know if he's an unreal No. 1 guy. But it's a good opportunity for him."

For fans in Minnesota still unsure exactly what they're getting in Talbot, this description from a coach might help: "He's a methodical, systematic goalie. You know what you're getting. If there's a rush, 2-on-1, and I showed 10 of them in a row, he would look the same every time. The fact that Minny has a good D-zone structure, it might be an OK match. ... I'm not

saying Minny is going to win the Cup, but they definitely might have found a goalie who will stop the ones he's supposed to."

26. Petr Mrazek, Hurricanes

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.33

It's a bit surprising that Mrazek is still the guy in Carolina. The Hurricanes pushed for an upgrade in goal during the offseason, including serious talks to add Marc-Andre Fleury. But Mrazek perseveres. And while he'll always have his critics (one panelist tried to give him a six), he's also won over others around the league.

"Petr has grown on me. I hated him in Detroit. He was all over the place," said a coach. "He plays with more control in his crease. I like him in Carolina. He's turned the page in his game, for sure."

Said another: "He's settled it down a bit. We're talking about a team in Carolina that doesn't give up as many shots. They have a good D. He's a little riskier than some of the guys we talk about. He hasn't changed enough of his game, but he's quieted his game down with maturity."

27 (tie). Thomas Greiss, Red Wings

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.37

Greiss is going from a very structured, strong defensive team in the Islanders to, well, one that is not. This spot very could be Jonathan Bernier, who was actually pretty good last season in a tough situation. The Red Wings seemed to realize that Bernier does well with a heavy workload, and it's possible he plays more than Greiss, who has had success as a spot starter. But Greiss got the offseason contract after a solid five seasons with the Islanders. The question is: Can he do that in Detroit?

"I like Greiss a lot. I think he's underrated. We'll see how he does now," said one panelist.

Added a head coach: "Greiss is better than a lot of the goalies on this list."

This seemed to be a fair summation of the goalie situation in Detroit: "(Greiss is) a good quality backup goalie. I don't think he's a No. 1 guy. I don't see him doing any better than Jonathan Bernier. They're comparable goalies."

27 (tie). Mikko Koskinen, Oilers

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.37

The Oilers' pursuit of Jacob Markstrom didn't pan out, so they're betting that Koskinen can deliver another solid season after last year's .917 save percentage in 38 games almost justified his healthy contract. The problem here is that if it doesn't work out, it's a big risk to have 38-year-old Mike Smith as the Plan B.

Koskinen is huge (6-foot-7) and, according to goalie coaches on the panel, beatable.

"He lets in bad goals," said one. "Bad angle shots find a way in at bad times. ... I wouldn't be comfortable with those two guys."

Said another: He's a big guy but once you get him moving, you can open him up. With Edmonton, (head coach Dave



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Tippett) does a good job, has a defensive system, but between (Koskinen) and Smith, they're both big guys and I just don't think they move that well. That's where I can see them getting opened up and letting in leakers."

29. Jonathan Quick, Kings

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.43

Quick is 34 years old. There's real concern about his body breaking down. He has an .896 save percentage the past two seasons. His team isn't great. It's not trending the right way for the former Stanley Cup winner and Olympian.

"He's gone right over the cliff," said one GM. "And he has time left on his contract, which is unfortunate for the team that employs him. That's not going to end well."

That's the pessimistic point of view. But a couple of panelists mentioned that the offseason has been a good one for Quick, and the word in the goalie community is that he had a good summer.

"I think we'll see a better Jonathan Quick," said a goalie coach.

Tier 4

30. Martin Jones, Sharks

Average 2021 tier rating: 3.77

The decline of Martin Jones has been a lengthy one. Since he finished sixth in the Vezina voting in the 2016-17 season, he has a .903 save percentage in 163 games. He's been a below-average goalie for much longer than he was a goalie worthy of his big contract.

And man, if this thought from a goalie coach doesn't cut right to the heart of it:

"He looks the part. He knows how to play. He just never gets it done," he said.

But Jones continues to have his defenders.

"I think he's been criticized for no reason at times," said one panelist.

Another thought a change of scenery would do him good.

"He's been in one spot for too long. A full career in one city is hard. It just grows old," he said. "Another problem is the game is changing. His ability to adjust to broken plays is not that great. There are times a puck ends up in a spot he doesn't think and he can barely get there. ... I understand why people don't like him, but I just think (a change) is overdue. I don't think he's as bad as he is."

31. Collin Delia, Blackhawks

Average 2021 tier rating: 4.23

Two things here. One, this assessment could have easily been Malcolm Subban. Or maybe even Kevin Lankinen. There's going to be an opportunity all three to seize the opening created by Corey Crawford's departure.

Two, a majority of panelists didn't know much about Collin Delia. Just being completely transparent here. In fact, two head coaches used the same exact phrase when his name came up: "I don't even know him."

That usually results in a lot of four and five ratings, which is probably a fair place to start Delia, considering he has 18 NHL games under his belt with a .906 save percentage.

Those who did know him tended to like him but didn't love the situation he was stepping into with the Blackhawks embarking in a full-on rebuild and already hit by adversity.

"There are a lot of fans of him," one panelist said. "People say he's a great guy. ... A lot of times, if you have an average goalie on a bad team, they look worse than they are. That's what is going to happen with him. He's going to have an average season on a team that may not have interest in playing hockey at times. A lot of this game is timing and luck in making it in this league, and this guy has awful timing."

Another assessment: "I'd give him a higher number if he wasn't on (Chicago). I like his skill."

"Good athletic goalie," said a coach. "He just hasn't played enough."



Hurricanes Uniform Schedule for the 2020-21 Season

Canes will wear Reverse Retro jerseys twice

by Michael Smith

For the second straight season, the Carolina Hurricanes' road white uniforms will be the team's most popular set, while the team will rotate through three jerseys at home in the 2020-21 regular season.

The Hurricanes will wear their white jerseys for all 28 of their road games. The 28-game home schedule will feature the standard home red sweaters, the black third jerseys and the gray Whalers kits.

The Canes will play 12 two-game series against Central Division opponents at home in the regular season, and in 10 of those sets, they won't wear the same jersey in consecutive games. The two exceptions: red sweaters against Florida on Jan. 21 and 23 and black jerseys against Nashville on March 9 and 11.

The Canes will sport their new Reverse Retro jerseys against two Original Six opponents in the regular season. The remixed gray Whalers set will debut on Friday, Feb. 19, when the Canes host the Chicago Blackhawks. The second throwback date is set for Saturday, April 10 when the Detroit Red Wings come to town.



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In total, here is the Hurricanes uniform breakdown for the 2020-21 regular season:

- White: 28 games
- Red: 14 games
- Black: 12 games

- Reverse Retro: 2 games

The Canes' helmets will have a new look to them for the 2020-21 season, as well. The team introduced PNC Bank as its official helmet branding partner. A small decal featuring a monochromatic PNC logo will be positioned on the left and right sides of each of the four helmets, while Canes branding will be featured on the back bottom left.

TriangleSportsNetwork

Carolina Hurricanes set pace for season to start

Coming in already conditioned, training camp gets team 'up to speed'

By Peter Koutroumpis

RALEIGH, N.C. – With the first week of training camp complete, the Carolina Hurricanes feel that they're ready to jump into the fast-approaching 2020-2021 season opener in Detroit on Jan. 14.

Effort and energy from the group has never been questioned by head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

It is the consistency and level of endurance that is maintained that the bench boss has to calibrate on a daily basis to be prepared for opening night against the Red Wings.

Is everything going according to the plan?

"That's a good question, I don't know for sure, I feel like it's pretty good," Brind'Amour said following Day 5 of on-ice sessions the Hurricanes have held at Wake Competition Center on Friday.

"We're never really gonna know until once that puck gets dropped and that first game's under our belt. You draw up the nine days of practice and you check it off the list and you go. We're pretty good with where we're at as far as I'd say accomplishing what we want to accomplish at this point. Still got a few more days obviously to put more stuff in. We'll have a game/scrimmage coming up soon to get the guys dialed in, but I think we're pretty good right now."

No worries in the crease

While goaltending is always a concern for any NHL team, and particularly in Carolina in recent years, both Petr Mrazek and James Reimer will continue to forge their tandem relationship to platoon in between the pipes and work to post wins.

Though some may not feel as comfortable with either being a full-time starter or may lean to one or the other for whatever reason, what the Hurricanes do possess in each is a competitive work ethic.

Both have illustrated disgust in not making a save and really focusing on every shot during camp so far.

They know what will be at stake daily during the NHL's shortened regular season – a 56-game slate with ample back-to-back sets that will keep Brind'Amour and his staff busy in deciding who steps into the crease each night.

For Mrazek, he doesn't consider the schedule difference as anything out of the ordinary, just the difference in preparing for it.

"It's different this year without the preseason games and without a longer training camp," Mrazek pointed out.

"I'm just trying to establish myself to do as much good things on the ice and compete...I feel good physically and in good condition.

"It's not tougher than when you have normal seasons. When you look at it, you play back-to-back games as you normally play, then we have two days without a game. You look at the schedule, you don't look back, you don't look at the past, you look at it like it's just a normal regular season."

Reimer's focus has been to work with a high level of intensity every day.

"You're not gonna have that middle section of exhibition games to try to find your mental game or try to find your rhythm," Reimer noted.

"I think it's tough as a goalie to find that rhythm in practice. It's tough to get game-like situations in practice, so I think if you can take care of your mental side as much as possible and try to be dialed in for every shot or every scenario, then it just helps lessen that gap from Game 1."

Maintaining pace and tempo throughout

With the non-stop skating and puck battling that the Hurricanes' style of play demands, there is very little room for any let-up or 'taking a breath' as Brind'Amour terms it, from anyone on the roster, including the two netminders.

While they're scrapping to finish the job as the last line of defense on every shot they face, both Mrazek and Reimer have the unique observational perspective to provide feedback and encouragement to teammates when they are taking too many breaths, so-to-speak.

Both have been satisfied with what they've seen so far.

"It's tough to say after the first week. I think everyone looks pretty good," Mrazek said

"I think everyone's ready to go. Everyone's really excited for the season to start."

Who drives the bus?



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So what happens when the goaltenders are working hard, but they don't see the same in front of them?

What's the dynamic in Carolina? Do the goalies call out their teammates to show how much they care and to 'pick it up'? Do they need to do that?

Reimer fielded the question diplomatically.

"More so, I think that's Roddy's job, and he does a good job of that.

"I mean at times as a goalie you can add a little emotion to a practice when you're hootin' and hollering or chirpin' a guy when you make a good save or somethin' like that. But, at the same time, Roddy does a good job of making sure the intensity is there, and when he doesn't see it, he calls us on it.

That's part of being a good coach. I think we've done a good job – our practices have been pretty good as far as the tempo, but there is a difference between practice and games. So, from my standpoint, you just try to have as high a level of intensity as possible."

Brind'Amour followed up on the question of motivating to produce consistency in pace from his team when asked.

"I shouldn't have to do that too often," Brind'Amour said.

"Human nature – guys are at training camp, and we're pushin' pretty hard I guess on Day 5 – we expected it to be really good the first few days. Which it was; everyone's excited to be back. Now, there's this little lull until you play and guys just wanna get at it. We don't have guys that don't bring it all the time. It is part of my job, but it's not something I have to do very often."

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1198434 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes Prospects Impress at 2021 World Juniors

DYLAN RUDOLPH

JANUARY 9TH, 2021

The 2020-21 NHL season is just days away, and training camp has begun. Players and prospects for the Carolina Hurricanes will compete for the limited roster spots before their first game on Jan. 14 against the Detroit Red Wings.

Every young prospect has a long road to the NHL, but a few have gotten a head start on showing why they belong. The 2021 World Junior Championship finally concluded after almost two weeks of hard competition where prospects around the world were given center stage to exhibit their abilities.

The Hurricanes had four prospects compete for three different squads in the tournament. Each one contributed well and made good cases for why they belong at the next level. Here is how each fared during the competition.

Ryan Suzuki

Carolina's 28th overall pick in 2019 was a bit of a surprise to make the final cut of Team Canada's impressive squad of players, but he showed early on that he fit in. Suzuki impressed in the first game, scoring one of 16 goals against Team Germany and finishing the tournament with two goals and four points in seven games. The 19-year-old centerman was the only Hurricanes' prospect to leave Edmonton with a medal, settling for silver after losing 2-0 in the gold medal game to Team USA.

Top #OHL scorers at the 2021 #WorldJuniors 
pic.twitter.com/DYegMcT9Si

— OntarioHockeyLeague (@OHLHockey) January 8, 2021

Suzuki will not be eligible for the tournament next year due to him being over the age limit. He instead will now look to compete for an NHL spot this season. The young center is known for being a great puck handler with excellent vision and passing skills. Should he survive his second round of cuts in the last month, he should make another big impact, this time at the NHL level.

Vasili Ponomaryov

Carolina's young Russian was a force right out of the gate, with a team-leading two points in a 5-3 win over Team USA in his first game of the competition. The 18-year-old Ponomaryov finished the tournament with three points in seven games played, impressing mostly with his mature defensive game on Russia's fourth line that helped his team make the Bronze Medal Game, where it lost to Team Finland.



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Vasili Ponomaryov puts Russia on the board. #WorldJuniors
pic.twitter.com/z6KlfBdjAG

— NHL Network (@NHLNetwork) December 26, 2020

The expectation is Ponomaryov will compete for an NHL spot, but his inexperience and having missed some of camp due to the tournament may do more harm than good for this season in particular. Though the 19-year-old center showed his impressive two-way ability, he will likely be relegated back to the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League for another season before he truly has a shot to crack the Hurricanes' roster.

Noel Gunler

Perhaps the most underrated tournament performance, Gunler averaged a point-per-game, including four goals in his five tournament matches. The 2020 second-round pick showed off his touted sniping ability that the Hurricanes hope will translate well at the NHL level.

Unfortunately, Gunler and Team Sweden saw their tournament end in the first matchup of the elimination bracket, losing 3-2 to the eventual bronze medal winners Team Finland. Gunler's impressive performance was cut short, but he may have shown enough to warrant a flyer on the active roster for the upcoming NHL season.

Zion Nybeck

Gunler's teammate and fellow Hurricanes' prospect was quiet for most of the World Juniors this year, recording just one point in his five games played. Consigned to fourth-line minutes, the 5-foot-8 forward struggled to get a lot of playing time but still showcased his motor and did some dirty work that did not show up on the box score.

Like Ponomaryov, the 18-year-old may need another couple of years in juniors before the Canes call him up. Fortunately for him, he has a chance to improve on his showing next year at the 2022 World Juniors should he make it again.

Zion Nybeck HV71

Zion Nybeck of HV71 (HV71)

These four, along with many other aspirants, now move to compete for an active roster spot — or a taxi squad spot with the Hurricanes. With a more condensed schedule, the team may need these younger players now more than ever, and they may have another unique chance to again show the league that they belong at the next level.

Hockey Writers LOADED: 01.10.2021

1198543 Websites

The Athletic / 'I got a burning desire': Bruce Boudreau owns team, but NHL coaching still calls

Eric Stephens

Jan 9, 2021

Bruce Boudreau is a hockey coach and, if life makes it so, will be one until the day he dies. That's just how it's going to be.

But Boudreau is also the owner of a hockey team, and it took a manner of seconds for the jovial bench boss to apply his unique take on handling the relationship between the two.

"If it was in the NHL, I'd sure like to be the owner when I'm coaching," he said. "I'd probably last a little longer in the spot that I was at."

Among the coaches in NHL history with the best winning percentage, someone who took his Washington, Anaheim and Minnesota teams to multiple Stanley Cup playoff appearances, the 66-year-old Boudreau isn't shy about his desires. A final kick at the can would be ideal. He had a conversation with Capitals general manager Brian MacLellan about their coaching opening but also knew MacLellan had his eye on landing Peter Laviolette. New Jersey had some appeal, but the Devils hired Lindy Ruff. There was some discussion with the Toronto Maple Leafs over an assistant role that ultimately didn't materialize.

Who knows whether a team decides to make a change in this lightning-quick season? Or which team will do it over the summer. There is still much he feels he can offer a team.

"It's something I still want to do," Boudreau said. "I got a burning desire to coach in the NHL. I think I'm still very capable of doing it. I just have to wait and be patient."

There are things to do in the meantime. Boudreau and his wife, Crystal, have settled in Hershey, Pa., where they will bring a new team to the city. It will compete in the United States Premier Hockey League, a Tier III Junior A level alliance, at venerable Hersheypark Arena beginning next season. And on a Zoom call Friday to make the announcement, Boudreau was doing what is as natural to him as breathing. Selling the game of hockey.

There was the plan "within the next month or two" of contests to name the team and the colors it will wear. The famed arena has been secured, a place where he wants players to know about its history. Who Wilt Chamberlain was and how it was the site of his legendary 100-point game, still the highest single-game total in NBA history. Already in the new owner's mind is giving the locker rooms a good reworking. There is also the immediate goal of building a bridge to the American Hockey League's Hershey Bears, whose history in the city dates to 1938.

Boudreau does come into this venture with experience. He and his wife also are owners of the Minnesota Blue Ox in the USPHL. They're able to own both franchises as the league has 62 teams across the U.S. and the two teams are in separate divisions and don't play against each other.

The Boudreaus still have their stake in the Coon Rapids team with fellow co-owner and head coach Jay Witta. The ties there remain strong. Their son, Brady, was a goalie for the Blue Ox and is now an assistant coach for them. When Bruce was coaching the Wild, it was Crystal who was essentially directing the day-to-day business behind the scenes. Now Brady is learning the business side.

Hockey is a family enterprise. Boudreau wants to bring that to Hershey.

"There's a good chance (Brady) will come back here and live in Hershey and have some involvement with the team there," he said. "Ben is in Fort Wayne in the East Coast League. My other son (Andy) is talking about wanting to get involved. My daughter (Kasey) does a lot of stuff on the web. She wants to get involved, so I really want to make it sort of a family affair. And this is a great spot for that."

Hershey is a special place for the man many in hockey simply refer to as "Gabby." After a fourth straight first-round exit in the Calder Cup playoffs, Boudreau was fired by the AHL's Manchester Monarchs. Months later in 2005, the Bears hired him. The marriage was perfect from the outset. In spring 2006, Boudreau led the AHL's most storied franchise to its ninth of 11 titles.

Boudreau would helm the Bears to a 51-win season the next season and was into his third year when the then-lowly Capitals promoted the 53-year-old after he had plugged away in the minors for 14 years. But love for Hershey had taken root.

"When you're traveling like me at that time, being in the minors all my life, and you come to a place that totally embraces you and make instantly lifelong friends," Boudreau said, explaining what the town means to him. "And then all of a sudden, you're playing in a building where we averaged 9,000 to 10,000 people a game. It was like a little NHL building. The history of it."



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"From (Bears president and GM) Doug Yingst to (former chairman) Bruce McKinney to everybody that was involved at that time telling you every day, we would learn more history. I thought this would be a tremendous area to live when it was getting near the end."

Talk to Boudreau for any length of time and a story is bound to be told. Winning the Calder Cup might as well have happened last week.

"The way we won it," he started to reminisce. "I think anybody that's still around and remembers that Game 7 against Portland, winning it overtime with John Walton making the call was absolutely phenomenal. And then winning (the title) in Milwaukee. And they had Pekka Rinne and Shea Weber and all of those boys on the team. It was a pretty special moment.

"It got me more involved in the town and the people involved in Hershey than ever before."

There is always a story. When his time as a player with the Springfield Indians was brought up, Boudreau launched right into another one.

"We had some pretty iconic games where there was memorable brawls," he said, with that familiar, boyish Boudreau grin gleaming as he talked. "And when you got to play in a game where there was the 5,000 people there. It was loud, and they love their hockey. So many great people have come through Springfield in their time. Especially as broadcasters. John Forslund's still a good friend of mine. Chris Kerber is a good friend of mine. I met some great people that have become lifelong friends going to Springfield.

"The only thing I was ever disappointed about Springfield is they tore down the White Hut. That's where we used to eat our burgers every afternoon."

When a reporter brought up the White Hut being reopened under new management, Boudreau yelled, "No way!"

"I'll tell you a quick story," he followed. "We used to go there every day almost. When I got the job in Hershey, our trainer Dan Stuck, I would tell him about the White Hut all the time. We took the bus and we went straight there. And I hadn't been back in 20 years almost, say 17 years.

"So, the whole team got out of the bus and went to the White Hut. I walked in and the cooks looked at me and said, 'Gabby, you're back!' and I hadn't been there in 17 years. I thought that was a pretty special spot. It's the best."

Part of the reason Boudreau is creating another USPHL team is his desire to see hockey players past the high school age continue their dreams and play in competitive leagues even if they aren't the NHL or the AHL or even the top junior teams in the U.S. and Canada. He points to the opportunities given to players not only in Minnesota but also Iowa, Nebraska and Wisconsin. Or from places such as Sweden, Finland, Kazakhstan and Australia.

When in Hershey, Boudreau would love to see more ice rinks built in the town and have that lead to more youth participation. And maybe a kid is able to move up through the ranks of competition. Maybe there is among them another Charlie Coyle, who once played for the USPHL's South Shore Kings and is now a Boston Bruins forward.

There is one thing he won't do as an owner.

"I know as a coach, I don't want interference from the owners and the general manager," Boudreau said. "So, I made a point in Minnesota never to interfere with what he was doing. If he asked me questions, be happy. I'd run a practice now and again for him and that would be great. But I didn't want to interfere because everybody has their own ideas.

"And I didn't want to be that owner that comes down in between periods and say, 'What the hell are you doing? This is wrong.' Even though I might go home and tell my wife, 'Jesus, I don't like what he's doing.' But I'm not the one to tell him his job. I didn't want to ever fire anybody. I don't plan on firing anybody."

Boudreau is busy these days. He likes busy. He'll be doing the thing that he is also known for: talking. On his docket is a run at the NHL Network, where he'll be an analyst over the upcoming opening week of the new season. When he can fit it into his schedule, he will also break down the Capitals for NBC Sports Washington.

Nothing fuels him more than coaching. Those instincts jumped right out when he did a practice run of a game with a play-by-play announcer. He never did become the star scorer in the NHL that he was in junior hockey, but he was right at home behind the bench. His name was made by turning around every club he led.

To Bruce Allan Boudreau, to coach is to be.

"Instead of sounding exciting, I was always complaining about (how) that guy made a mistake," Boudreau said. "He should have been here, he should have been there. And when I watch games on TV, it's like I'm looking at how they set up system-wise and to find out if teams are doing anything different. Especially the world juniors. I wanted to see if they're doing things different than I would have done things as a scheme. Not as players go.

"So, I'm always thinking. I think that way as a coach. I don't know, it's in my blood. Every game I watch it seems like that's what I'm doing. I hope it never leaves. This is what I was, swear to God, put on the earth (to do). To grow hockey and to be part of hockey my whole life.

"And that's what I'm hoping to do."

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The Athletic / Hockey's toxic culture: After a troubling year, can the game finally change?

Dan Robson

Jan 9, 2021

I remember my first time through the red door.

It was inside locker room No. 4, at the far end of the hallway beneath the lobby at Brampton Memorial Gardens. It led to the permanent dressing room of the Brampton Capitals, the local Tier II Junior A team.

The red door was enticing to any young player in the Brampton minor hockey system. Dreams of playing in the NHL, or even the CHL, seemed far away then. The Capitals locker room was more immediate. You could touch it.

There were tales of carpeted floors, trainers who sharpened your skates and cleaned your jersey, and a room full of sticks. The players lucky enough to walk through the door were often just a few years older than the kids who packed the stands on Thursday nights — but in the hierarchy of adolescence, they seemed like kings.

Brampton Memorial was the kind of arena that held the weight of the game's history. With trophy cases in the lobby filled with photos of teams that your grandparents might have played on. Beneath arched rafters, a portrait of the Queen hung at one end. Banners won by the Capitals over the years lined the other.

There is a rink just like Brampton Memorial in most towns in Southern Ontario and across Canada. Many of those arenas have their own version of the red door, coloring the dreams of kids and shaping the futures of adolescents.



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For many, walking through those doors leads to friendships, popularity and a sense of belonging. For a few, those doors lead to the NHL.

For some, however, those doors lead to something much different — and, sometimes, a wish they'd never been opened in the first place.

The last year — through hockey's longest and most uncertain season — stories about abusive and toxic behaviour at the game's highest levels appeared one after the other.

In November, 2019, stories of bullying by Mike Babcock emerged after he was fired as head coach by the Leafs.

In the aftermath of Babcock's firing, Akim Aliu revealed racist comments made by his former coach Bill Peters, who then resigned as the Flames head coach.

In April, New York Rangers defenceman K'Andre Miller was attacked with racist slurs during a Zoom call with fans.

In May, the Washington Capitals' Brendan Leipsic made a series of misogynistic comments in a private chat on Instagram that went public.

In June, former players Dan Carcillo and Garrett Fraser launched a class-action lawsuit in Toronto that alleged incidents from bullying to physical and sexual abuse in the Canadian Hockey League, the top tier of junior hockey.

Also in June, Eric Guest — a 20-year-old former junior hockey player — went public on Instagram with stories of the hazing, bullying and misogyny he witnessed over three seasons (2016-19) with the OHL's Kitchener Rangers.

The explosive stories included allegations he was forced by older players to use illicit drugs when he was 16. And in a series of subsequent videos, Guest described a culture rooted in locker room hierarchy. The abuse, Guest says, was condoned by team coaches and management — whom he says turned a blind eye to it.

Guest's allegations were shocking, revealing the kind of horrific behaviour that many argued had long been erased from the game.

But Guest wasn't surprised when his inbox flooded with messages from people who had experienced the same.

"I've heard from tons of kids. And not just kids. Adults who back in their day they saw and went through stuff like this," Guest says. "There's definitely tons and tons of people who feel the same way."

As the pandemic-related stoppage pushed our attention away from the ice, we started to heed the calls for change from the highest levels of the game down to its grassroots.

There has been a collective acknowledgment that something fundamental about hockey's culture allowed these incidents to happen.

But these aren't the first calls for reform or the first allegations of racism, abuse and bullying. In 2003, John Vanbiesbrouck used racist language as a junior coach and resigned. Aliu endured hazing when he played in the OHL. And David Frost, then a junior coach in Canada, faced multiple charges of sexual exploitation in Ontario, allegations dating from 1995-2001 for which he was later acquitted.

Each headline sparked widespread calls for change.

This time, though, the conversation seemed different. Concerns about the toxic side of hockey culture have surfaced for years — but never with such volume or force.

On the verge of a new season, hockey's leading bodies appear to be taking a critical look inward, conceding the need for change. More than any time in the sport's history, a fundamental shift in the game's underlying culture seems possible.

"I'm hopeful that some of the situations I went through, no one has to go through again," Guest says.

But what is different this time around? As a new season in the game begins, is the sport really prepared for change?

Akim Aliu's revelations about racism he faced in hockey led to the creation of the Hockey Diversity Alliance. (Thomas Skrlj / For The Athletic)

I first reached the other side of the red door as a Capitals call-up when I was 15 years old. It was everything I'd heard it would be.

There was, indeed, carpet on the floor and gear hanging in individual stalls, alongside heavy, pressed sweaters with last names stitched across the back. It was exhilarating and intimidating. It felt like I'd entered a man's world, even though the players on the team were mostly in their late teens. Some kept to themselves, carrying serious looks as they prepped to play. Others were loud, some obnoxious — and the language was adult and vulgar. Pornographic images were stuck to the walls with hockey tape.

It was a "boys only" clubhouse.

When I returned as a regular player a couple of seasons later, those pictures were gone. But the culture of the room was the same. Loud and rude. Hypersexualized. Hypermasculine. And hyper-White.

I didn't think much of it then because it was hockey. This was how I'd come to understand the culture of the game I grew up with.

I didn't know what misogyny was at the time, but it was standard practice. Homophobic phrases were tossed around casually and sometimes aggressively. Insults were common, but usually made in jest. It was a culture of toughness; a culture where you learned to "man up."

It was intense and serious. Professional, almost, as far as I understood what that meant. Winning was essential — and if you weren't helping the club toward that end, it was understood that you'd be dealt, potentially to a team far away, which would mean leaving your world behind or the end of your young career. The stakes felt enormous.

But here's an important thing about the red door: When it was opened for me, I was welcomed in. I never faced bullying or humiliation. I was never the target of hateful comments or slurs. I looked like everyone else. I belonged.

Hockey gave me a lot. In my youth, I counted only the positive experiences. I learned the value of hard work and the importance of being part of a team. It gave me self-confidence and status.

But I was also blind to how my experiences conditioned my understanding of who belonged in the game.

It never occurred to me then that, even in one of Canada's most diverse cities, I could count on one hand the number of Black teammates or teammates of color from my minor hockey years. Or that every coach I ever had was White.

It never occurred to me that while we slung homophobic slurs, there might have been a gay teammate in the room. (Not to mention just how casually hateful those comments were.)

While I viewed hockey as being central to my identity, I also implicitly defined the game as being something that belonged to people like me. I failed to understand how those who didn't look like me or think like me could love the game as I did.

Hockey gave me that, too.

Ryan Munce doesn't exactly remember when his hatred for the locker room eclipsed his love for the game.

But it was likely sometime in his rookie season with the Sarnia Sting in 2002, when he says he was tormented by teammates and forced to take part in humiliating and abusive rituals, which he and other rookies endured throughout the season. The torment and abuse were so constant that Munce says he battled suicidal thoughts.



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He compares the experience to “Lord of the Flies,” the book by William Golding in which a group of boys attempt to govern themselves on a stranded island.

“It was horrendous for us,” Munce says.

Those allegations are part of the proposed class-action lawsuit against the CHL in which Carcillo, his former Sting teammate and a retired NHL player, is one of the lead plaintiffs. Munce is one of several players from that roster who came forward to corroborate the disturbing allegations of abuse.

Those allegations have since been echoed in affidavits by more former Canadian Hockey League players alleging graphic incidents of abuse and humiliation. The claims span from the late 1970s through to 2014.

But these stories read like old chapters in the canon of hockey hazing. Anyone who has played the game at a high level has at least heard versions of the same horrors. Or experienced them.

It’s that culture, adopted by coaches and players alike, that allows these toxic traditions to persist. It’s a culture that, on the surface, prides itself on team dynamics and hard work — but also reinforces a corrosive idea of what it takes to belong and succeed.

One of the fundamental tenets of the sport’s culture is that players see themselves as distinct from society, says Michael Robidoux, a researcher with the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa, who studied the social structures of competitive hockey in his book “Men At Play.”

The idea of exceptionality has roots in the game itself, Robidoux says. You can do things on the ice that you can’t do in the real world. If you’re angry, you can fight. You can shout obscenities and hurl insults. It’s not just allowed; it’s expected. Off the ice, those exceptions apply to the locker room — or, the boys’ club.

And when someone enters the fraternity at a young age, behaviors become engrained.

You are influenced by what you see and what you experience. You’re influenced by your coaches and your teammates.

“Minor hockey becomes an institution that shapes us,” says Tim Skuce, a professor with the faculty of education at Brandon University who has researched how concepts of masculinity are reinforced through hockey. “It’s an ever-narrowing perspective of what it means to be a man.”

In some cases, the way young players are molded is subtle, built on everyday language that reinforces the idea of what kind of person belongs in the club, including the use of homophobic, misogynistic or racist language.

In other cases, it’s overt — with hazing rituals intended to strip victims of their identity and make them subject to locker-room hierarchy.

Although they played in different decades, Munce and Guest both describe similar cultures festering beneath junior hockey’s polished veneer. Both found the enforced hierarchy impossible to break away from. Everything they spent their young lives working for was on the line.

Inside the bubble, Guest felt that there was little he could do.

“I felt like I was on an island,” he says. “When you’re in that situation, it’s tough to go against all of your teammates and all of your peers.”

Munce played goal with the Sting for three years before spending several years playing minor pro and retiring in 2011. He knew the game was doing more harm to him than good.

“I quit because of the room,” he says. “I couldn’t deal with the room anymore. I loved the game. I hated the room.”

In my earliest years of minor hockey, I attended David Frost’s hockey school in Brampton along with many other minor hockey rep players in the area.

He was the Capitals coach for a short time before I joined the team, too. He was on the bench when I, dreaming of one day playing for the team, used to sit in the stands at Memorial Arena on Thursday nights.

I don’t remember thinking about Sheldon Keefe until I was older.

When I was still in minor hockey, Keefe was one of the top players in the OHL with the Barrie Colts — a talented roster that might have one of the worst reputations in junior hockey history. Many of my teammates looked up to Keefe. I know that some of them knew him through the world of Brampton hockey. I vaguely remember hearing some of the stories of what major junior was like.

But several years later, when allegations of sexual exploitation involving Frost and teenaged girls spilled out in court, I questioned hockey culture for the first time. (Frost was eventually acquitted of the charges.) It was a culture that often dismissed “boys being boys.” One that condoned behaviors that wouldn’t be accepted elsewhere but were allowed because of the privileges that come with earning your place on a team. Implicitly, being part of that team means not questioning it.

The exploitation of that culture has created opportunities for predatory behavior.

A recent investigative series by The Athletic’s Katie Strang revealed years of alleged sexual abuse of young athletes by a well-known Chicago-area hockey coach, Tom “Chico” Adrahtas. Strang’s reporting led to an investigation of USA Hockey president Jim Smith regarding his handling of the allegations against Adrahtas during his tenure as president of the Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois.

The Adrahtas allegations echoed the story of junior hockey coach Graham James, who was convicted of sexual assault after abusing players on his team.

While these examples of abuse are the horrific exception, each persisted within a culture of unquestioned power and exploited vulnerability.

In the years since his well-publicized experiences in junior hockey, Keefe became a rising star behind the bench at the Junior A level, then in the OHL and AHL. Now as the head coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs, he has achieved one of the most notable second acts in the game.

He has built a reputation as a well-respected coach who maintains a team culture that is largely devoid of the behavior that occurred during his playing days.

Keefe, 40, doesn’t believe his experiences with Frost were necessarily indicative of hockey culture at large.

“That’s all a part of who I am and what my life has become, but I don’t associate that with hockey culture,” Keefe says. “I don’t relate it to anything that came as a result of the culture I was a part of within my teams or league, or wherever I was playing. It was independent of all of that.”

But toxic behavior from bullying and hazing to misogyny and homophobia, Keefe says, were certainly present throughout his junior hockey career.

“As you come in as a young player ... you figure that’s what it’s like. And then that becomes part of it, and it becomes part of you,” Keefe says. “And that cycle continues. The older players leave and the younger players grow older and that’s what they’ve come to expect.”

Keefe is certain, however, that there has finally been a shift in the sport.

“All these issues in the world that we’re dealing with right now are reminders that we have so many areas to grow, and so much to continue to learn, and so much progress to make still,” Keefe says. “Yet I do believe, and I know for certain, that the hockey culture has improved greatly.”

Through efforts by Hockey Canada and other governing bodies, Keefe says, fewer players have experienced the kind of toxic culture that existed when he played in the OHL 20 years ago. Now, he says, when



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players are treated with respect, they pass that expectation on to the next group.

"It's not perfect, clearly," he says. "And I don't know that it ever will be. But we have to work towards that."

It's difficult to predict what's on the other side of hockey's longest season.

Will calls for a fundamental shift in hockey culture continue? Will they sputter on good intentions but never really bring meaningful change? And can a game as stubborn and steeped in tradition really change course?

The NHL's return in August after a five-month delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic began with a powerful statement against racism in hockey from the Minnesota Wild's Matt Dumba, a member of the new Hockey Diversity Alliance, which was formed in the spring by several current and former NHL players with the goal of combating prejudice at all levels of the game.

A few weeks later, the NHL postponed games after players in the playoff bubble requested that the league pause in response to anti-Black violence, as protests swept across North America and other professional leagues halted play.

It was an unprecedented moment in the game's history.

In early September, the NHL announced a series of initiatives that it hopes will address racism and promote diversity in the sport, including the creation of executive, player and fan committees to focus on improving inclusion within each area.

Each of those committees met through the fall, sharing ideas for how to make the game more inclusive.

The HDA has since expressed disappointment that the NHL had not agreed to a pledge outlining specific benchmarks that it wants the league to reach and announced that it would continue to operate independent of the league.

Kim Davis — who started her role as the NHL's executive vice president of social impact, growth initiatives and legislative affairs three years ago — says the past year was emotional for her as both a Black woman and an executive within the NHL. Davis says she didn't expect to see these conversations develop so quickly, but she is buoyed by the fact that they are happening.

"I think sports plays an important role in society. You know, Nelson Mandela says sports can actually be a catalyst to change the world," Davis says. "I do think that that's true. I think the voices of players are an important aspect of that and how they choose to use their voices — and we've seen a real shift in our sport around how players are using their voices."

But while players speak up, Davis says the league has a responsibility to guide the sport at all levels.

"I think the role of the NHL specifically as the North Star of the sport of hockey, is to be a leader and to put a stake in the ground around the things that are going to be important to the future of our sport — and hopefully, the other actors in the sport will follow," Davis says.

Those efforts have begun, although only recently.

USA Hockey started tracking demographic information of its participants based on race only in 2018. Almost 80 percent of its 561,700 participants identified as White last year.

Hockey Canada has not tracked racial demographics of its 750,000 participant in the past, but plans to begin in the 2021-22 season.

The governing body for the sport in Canada, which represents players across 13 leagues, including the CHL, has also never specifically tracked incidents of verbal taunts, insults or intimidation based on race.

But the organization is taking steps to develop an incident-tracking system that will allow it to record incidents of racism, bullying and

harassment. It will also launch task forces to improve equity, diversity and inclusion, as well as one to focus on issues of gender identity. Hockey Canada also says it will commit to having more diversity on its board.

The CHL says that each of its regional leagues have programs in place to address hazing, abuse, harassment and bullying. It recently launched an independent review panel that includes Sheldon Kennedy, a former player who is now an anti-child abuse advocate, to assess its policies and practices.

Beyond these governing bodies, marginalized voices in the game are starting to be heard. Brock McGillis, the first professional hockey player to come out as gay, has spoken widely about the rampant homophobia and bullying that exists at all levels of the sport. He's been critical that moves toward change within the NHL and other bodies have been largely superficial.

"Until people admit there are (systemic) problems, it will never shift," McGillis says.

Even well-intentioned public gestures, like putting rainbow tape on a stick or making a social media post against racism, can create the illusion that issues within the game have been addressed, he says. What must be rooted out are the quiet chuckles at homophobic jokes, the silence in the face of racist rhetoric and the inaction to bullying.

Aliu, who fought against hazing in the OHL in 2005 — back when it seemed like hockey was facing a reckoning — has become a leading voice for more inclusion in hockey as a co-founder of the HDA.

"Hockey is one of those sports that is 'Just for White people,'" Aliu says. "You need to have kids from all facets of life ... from anywhere in the world to look at that sport and say I can see myself playing that game."

Aliu's foundation, Time To Dream, recently developed a minor hockey team made up of entirely Black, Indigenous and other minority groups, and covered the costs for it to play in a tournament in Toronto.

"We still have a lot of work to do," Aliu says. "But I'm not going to let this moment pass. ... This is just the beginning."

But lasting change will take much more than the efforts of players battling from the outside of hockey's insular culture.

It will take more than the activism of the Hockey Diversity Alliance. It will take more than Instagram posts from the game's most famous names.

It will take more than campaigns to show that "Hockey is For Everyone" or to "Change Hockey Culture."

It will take more than committees and action plans from governing bodies. And more than a season of public acknowledgment that change is needed.

Each is important, well-meaning and impactful. But alone, they are not enough.

We all play a role in constructing hockey culture.

What that culture looks like in the future will be determined by how seriously this moment is taken — or by how quickly it is dismissed — by each of us.

Because in the end, real change only happens when those who have sat comfortably beyond hockey's locked doors are prepared to understand that we're the ones who hold the keys.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' scrimmage a consequence-free first look at off-season changes

Chris Johnston

January 10, 2021, 12:37 AM

TORONTO -- It had been 103 days.

The amount of time from when I was at Rogers Place in Edmonton the night the Stanley Cup was awarded until Saturday night's visit to Scotiabank Arena for the Toronto Maple Leafs' intra-squad scrimmage.

This was the first access any reporters were granted to watch Leafs training camp because of provincial health restrictions. That meant four days worth of practices were held behind closed doors before word came down Friday that Ontario had officially accepted the NHL's protocols to stage the upcoming season here.

The Leafs did what they could to fill in the blanks, with head coach Sheldon Keefe providing a detailed recap of practice before each of his media availabilities. But it's amazing how little feel you truly get for camp when you can't see it with your own eyes.

Saturday's scrimmage carried no consequences, but it offered the first opportunity to start measuring growth and change before the puck officially drops on Toronto's season.

William Nylander was the most impactful player on the ice, for my money, with an honourable mention to Mitchell Marner. On that note, the Joe Thornton-Auston Matthews-Marner line was as much fun as expected. Newcomer Mikko Lehtonen showed some nice offensive instincts, but it remains to be seen how quickly he'll adjust to the increased speed and smaller rink dimensions. Oh, and holy mama can teenager Nick Robertson ever shoot the puck.

Blink and you'll miss it.

This shot from Nick Robertson is INSANE #NHLonSN
pic.twitter.com/qdltSDAEAt

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) January 10, 2021

Let's be real: This was more sloppy and less intense than what we'll see here Wednesday when the Montreal Canadiens visit on opening night. However the final score, 6-3, could be a preview of what the early portion of the regular season has in store after a league-wide sprint to return and no exhibition games.

As with everything during the pandemic, covering a game in this manner is actually starting to feel familiar. It went incredibly smooth.

Reporters had to fill out a health screening questionnaire before entering the arena, scanning a QR code and answering a series of questions. I was assigned seat 13 in row 1 of suite 4 in the gondola across from the usual press box -- a good 15 feet away from my Sportsnet colleague Shawn McKenzie and much farther than that from any of the other media members in attendance.

Besides the empty stands, the in-game presentation matched exactly what you'd normally expect. Arena host Mike Ross even started the night by saying "Ladies and gentlemen welcome to Scotiabank Arena" before rhyming off the usual warnings about pucks over the glass and the fact the building offers no re-entry privileges.

Once the game started, the pumped-in crowd noise seemed much louder than what we heard here during the NHL bubble in August. When John Tavares opened the scoring, the familiar "Hall and Oates" goal song blared over the speakers -- a reminder that some things haven't changed.

Gotta See It: Tavares pulls off nifty move for first goal of Maple Leafs scrimmage

The decisions

They've been made. They were essentially made before this camp began.

So it mattered not that Rasmus Sandin skated well and looked strong in his first game action in 10 months, or that Robertson's power-play rocket was accompanied by a more powerful stride than we saw in the NHL bubble. Or that Adam Brooks scored with a nice release.

They're all on the outside looking in, just as they have been since camp started.

"In terms of changes, I don't think you'll see much of that," said Keefe.

Sandin and Robertson appear to be knocking at the door after being bumped down by European free agents that were handed an opportunity ahead of them -- Lehtonen and Alexander Barabanov, respectively. But Keefe said he can only be so patient with the newcomers because of the compressed 56-game schedule so the kids should stay ready in the on-deck circle.

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Beyond that, the most intriguing lineup question surrounds Pierre Engvall. He took the place of an ailing Alex Kerfoot on the forechecking line, but committed some turnovers in the scrimmage that drew his coach's ire.

"I expect better from Pierre, to be honest, just in terms of his play with the puck," said Keefe. "We've got to just kind of redirect him towards the other end of the ice. But I thought he skated, he worked well, it was nice to see him score a big goal -- I think we might be coming up, if not past, the one-year anniversary of his last goal. So it was good to see that and get the confidence going in that sense.

"I was hoping for better from him."

Kerfoot is described as day-to-day, but has missed more than half of the abbreviated training camp. That may force Keefe to dress Engvall in the opener and if he's not comfortable playing him between Ilya Mikheyev and Zach Hyman, it will probably require a significant juggling of the lines.

Robertson annihilates slapshot past Dell

Manny's power play

Keefe has turned the power play responsibilities over to Manny Malhotra, the assistant coach he hired away from the Vancouver Canucks this off-season, and there are some significant differences to how things are being structured compared to last year.

Most notably, the Leafs are starting with two more balanced units rather than loading up PP1. They're also putting more of an emphasis on trying to create havoc in front of the goaltender.

"With Manny coming over here with his plan, prioritizing the net front was something that he wanted to do right from the start so you see that with [Wayne] Simmonds on one unit and [Zach] Hyman on the other," said Keefe. "So we want to give that an opportunity to go."

In Saturday's scrimmage, here's how the units were deployed:

PP1

Rielly

Matthews - Thornton - Marner

Simmonds

PP2



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Lehtonen

Nylander - Tavares - Robertson (place-holding for Jason Spezza)

Hyman

It's going to take some time for chemistry to build, although Nylander and Robertson each scored in man advantage situations. On the top unit, Matthews and Marner had the freedom to swap sides and worked the puck around nicely with Rielly but didn't involve Thornton very much in the bumper position.

"Auston and Mitch on the flanks are elite," said Rielly.

Keefe calls Matthews & Marner 'dynamic, all over the ice' in Leafs scrimmage

The goalie dance

The echoes of Oct. 2, 2018 can still be heard in these parts today.

Kyle Dubas hasn't forgotten what it was like to simultaneously lose his projected No. 3 and No. 4 goaltenders on the eve of that season -- with Curtis McElhinney (Carolina) and Calvin Pickard (Philadelphia) both plucked from the waiver wire -- and it's informed the Leafs' approach to the position now.

Toronto is trying to thread a fine needle before setting its opening night roster.

Michael Hutchinson was held out of Saturday's scrimmage after being placed on waivers earlier in the day. Should he clear Sunday, it would guarantee the Leafs a No. 3 option behind Frederik Andersen and Jack Campbell that could be designated for a taxi squad assignment.

Ideally, they'd like to send Hutchinson to the American Hockey League with Aaron Dell ahead of him in the No. 3 role, but there's no guarantee Dell will get through waivers himself. He's an experienced backup with more than 100 games of NHL experience (and slightly better career numbers than Hutchinson) who is on a manageable \$800,000, one-year deal.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

You have to believe the New Jersey Devils are searching for goaltending depth after Corey Crawford's abrupt retirement. Plus every NHL team is required to carry at least three healthy options at the position throughout the 2020-21 season -- and many of them could accommodate Dell's salary under the cap ceiling while keeping three goalies on the active roster.

That isn't likely to happen in Toronto, where the Leafs are managing a tight cap situation. It points to Dell being placed on waivers either Sunday or Monday with the organization hoping he clears and joins the taxi squad.

The uncertainty helps explain why both Dell and Hutchinson were signed to one-way contracts as free agents in October.

"We did that before we knew what the schedule was exactly going to look like and we just wanted to make sure that we had as much depth as possible," Dubas said at the outset of training camp. "Not knowing the way that things were going to be, we just felt that having as many capable NHL goaltenders was going to be important."

Once bitten, twice shy.

The new guys

This is a different group.

You throw Thornton, Simmonds and Zach Bogosian into a dressing room and you're going to be adding some flavour. A sharp spike in career

games played, not to mention chirps- and chatter-per-60. A big goal of this Leafs off-season was about changing the personality of the group.

"I've noticed a tremendous difference in that regard," said head coach Sheldon Keefe.

Thornton is the biggest kid in blue and white, celebrating a goal by Marner during Saturday's scrimmage as though the building was full of screaming fans and it actually meant something.

Celly scenes#LeafsForever pic.twitter.com/C612MkuUmy

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) January 10, 2021

It was no coincidence that Thornton got assigned a dressing room stall beside Tavares, a more serious lead-by-example type of captain. He can help shoulder the load. And as much as Jumbo is celebrated for his carefree approach to the game, he's not afraid to speak his mind when he feels a teammate needs to be held to account -- or the coach, as he gave Keefe the gears a couple times for skipping his line in Saturday's scrimmage.

They won't have to stitch a letter on his sweater for No. 97 to become part of the leadership group here.

"He can lean on me as much as he wants," Thornton said of Tavares. "I can be vocal with him in the locker-room and just -- you know, for me, just help. All I want to do is help guys play a long, long time. If any advice that I have to share with them [I'll do it]."

Keefe pointed out that it's easy to have good spirit among the group before any games have been lost. The new veterans have been tasked with helping make sure it stays that way.

The safety game

Lest anyone forget the most feared opponent this season, reminders are everywhere around the NHL.

The Dallas Stars have closed their practice facility for several days and are going to see at least their first three-regular season games rescheduled after six players and two staff members produced positive COVID-19 test results. Out of caution, the Columbus Blue Jackets cancelled practice Friday while the Pittsburgh Penguins called off a planned Saturday skate.

Toronto's coaching staff has had players on high alert since before Christmas, reasoning that any outbreak in the week or two leading up to camp would negatively affect preparations for the regular season.

Caution is the word.

"We've got masks on all the time around here, we get tested every day," said Thornton. "During meetings we're seven, eight feet apart from each other so we're keeping it real tight."

Keefe stressed that they want to be mindful of doing their part in the community after getting an exemption to play out of Scotiabank Arena this season. But it goes deeper than that. The lesson from the NFL and NBA -- where, for example, the Philadelphia 76ers got beaten Saturday while only having seven healthy players available -- is that there's competitive concerns at play here, too.

"We have talked a great deal about that," said Keefe. "We're trying to be as mindful of it as we can be with where we have our meetings. We've created more meeting space so we can spread people out and reduce any high-risk contacts and stuff like that."

They're back, and diligence is required to be at their best.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Dillon Dube ready to take on top-line duties in Calgary

Ryan Leslie & Eric Francis preview the upcoming season for the Calgary Flames by asking 3 big questions facing the club entering training camp.

Eric Francis

January 9, 2021, 5:07 PM

As a former captain of Canada's world junior team, Dillon Dube knows all about the pressure to produce.

What he isn't familiar with is the weight that comes with being drafted in fantasy hockey pools, where the 22-year-old Flames winger is sure to start getting snapped up.

Elevated to the top line in practice yesterday with Matthew Tkachuk and Elias Lindholm, the local product who took massive steps in the playoffs could be poised for a breakout season offensively.

But don't tell his parents or pals that.

"I have my close buddies and family around me and I know they wouldn't take me," laughed the native of nearby Cochrane, Alta., when asked if anyone's discussed snagging him in their pool. "I think my buddies would take Johnny and Monny – guys who produce consistently."

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

They may want to reconsider given the junior numbers he posted and the run Dube went on in the playoffs where he set a franchise record for scoring the opening goal in three consecutive games.

And he did it all on a third line checking unit that made him, Milan Lucic and Sam Bennett the talk of the team.

Despite his effectiveness as an energy-producing checker who fared well against Jamie Benn's top line in the playoffs, it's inevitable the second-round pick from 2016 will soon be elevated to top six minutes.

The only question is when.

The even-keeled star from Canada's gold-medal winning squad in 2018 knows there's some runway between now and Thursday's season-opener. But it bodes well for his chances with the big boys that he was promoted Saturday when the team amalgamated all its opening-night players into one group.

"It's exciting – it's an opportunity for sure, but the season hasn't started yet," said Dube, who solidified his status as an everyday NHLer last summer with four goals and five points in 10 playoff games.

"I feel ready. Being with those guys in the playoffs and producing the way we did gives you a lot of confidence and feels like you can contribute in that way for sure. We were playing hard-nosed hockey and the puck was going in the back of the net. I think our line in the bubble proved that we can have some offence and add that to my game."

Scoring 38 goals and 84 points in 53 games his last year in Kelowna, Dube is equipped with the skill, skating ability, work ethic and mindset to fit right in with the big boys.

"We're going to give him an opportunity there the next couple days but we want him to develop at a pace he's comfortable with," said Ward, who started camp with Dube on his usual checking line.

"We love how he's developed as a two-way player. He played with an awful lot of grit and he's rounded into an NHL player in lots of ways in a short period of time. He's a guy we're looking for to be a key offensive and 200-foot player for us. A guy who is going to be a big part of our core moving forward."

Is he ready now for top-six time?

"I don't see why not," smiled Dube, a left shooting winger the team uses on the right side.

"Everyone shoots for that. I want to be, but you accept what you have. We have such a deep team, so you make the most of that opportunity. That's the kind of player I've been throughout my career – find your way to do your best on the line you're on, helping that line and those individuals be their best. More pressure doesn't change what I've got to do on the ice."

But it changes the way poolies, and potentially his pals, draft.

Why Tkachuk needs to take a step forward for Flames to be cup contenders

SATURDAY CAMP NOTES:

Brett Ritchie's six-foot-four, 220-pound frame joined the club today on a PTO, skating in the second group alongside Byron Froese and Buddy Robinson. All three are likely taxi squad players with NHL experience who can jump into the lineup at any time.

"He's an NHL player that provides us with depth," said Ward of the 27-year-old Ritchie, who has 271 NHL games to his credit.

"For a big man he's got great skill. Another right shot player on a team full of lefties. There's a lot of things we like about the potential fit there. We really like what we saw today."

Oliver Kyllington made his first appearance at camp after being cleared of quarantine duties, but Bennett skated on his own after missing the team's scrimmage for "precautionary reasons."

World Junior participants Jakob Pelletier, Connor Zary and Dustin Wolf are in Calgary and awaiting medical clearance to join the group as early as tomorrow. They were told they'd play in Monday's intra-squad game.

Pelletier's leadership was on full display after Canada's gold medal game loss as he was seen skating over to every player to console them.

"It's just the person I am," said the Flames first rounder from two years back.

"I just wanted to be there for the boys. It's hard to lose like that and to see the guys we were with for 51 days cry and be disappointed. To be there for them was one of my goals after the game for sure."

LINES ON SATURDAY FOR MAIN GROUP

Tkachuk -- Lindholm -- Dube

Gaudreau -- Monahan -- Simon

Mangiapanne -- Backlund -- Leivo

Lucic -- Ryan -- Nordstrom/Rinaldo

Giordano -- Andersson

Hanifin -- Tanev

Valimaki -- Nesterov

Mackey -- Stone

Markstrom

Rittich

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens season preview: Can forward depth make up for lack of star power?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2021

Eric Engels

January 9, 2021, 10:32 AM

BROSSARD, Que. — Montreal Canadiens media availability buzz words: excited, confident, fast, big, experienced, skilled, eager, ready.

With a couple dozen Zoom conferences in the books, it's starting to sound like a broken record around here.

Get this season started already!

As chronicled when training camp broke, a Canadiens team that finished 24th in the 2019-20 NHL standings — one that had about as much business participating in the bubble playoffs as I would in a breakdancing competition — isn't shying away from lofty expectations in 2021. General manager Marc Bergevin recently said his group "means business," that they're "here to win" and that they can play "any way you want," and that was before coach Claude Julien said, "I see no reason we can't make it right to the end."

Every player we've spoken to since has echoed those sentiments, vaunting a lineup that boasts seven new players, depth at all positions, a balance of youth and experience and what they feel is an unrivalled goaltending tandem.

Health will be the ultimate determinant in Montreal's success, with injuries always a risk and with the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak lingering over everything like smog on a sunny day.

A smooth transition from camp to regular-season play is also a key factor for a team integrating so many new players — especially with so little time to prepare. You can stumble out of the gate, but you can't fall flat and take your time getting back up in a 56-game season.

But these Canadiens aren't concerned about that. They believe they're coming together and that they're prepared to do some serious damage in an all-Canadian division they expect will be as competitive — if not more competitive — as any of the other three in the league.

Additions: Jake Allen (G), Joel Edmundson (D), Alexander Romanov (D), Josh Anderson (RW), Tyler Toffoli (RW/LW), Michael Frolik (LW/RW), Corey Perry (RW).

Subtractions: Max Domi (to the Columbus Blue Jackets), Dale Weise (unsigned)

It's a massive transition from playoff hopeful to Stanley Cup contender, and we're going to wait to see what develops before labelling the Canadiens a Stanley Cup contender.

Still, as noted, they believe they can hoist their 25th Cup in July, if they stay relatively healthy.

We need to see them prove they're worthy, but we think they're a versatile team; a fast and skilled team; a balanced and deep team; a beefy, in-your-face team that won't be pushed around; a team that will likely excel in playoff-type games the 2021 season will feature.

But we also see a team missing the type of top-end talent up front that most of its competition possesses. The Canadiens may have three balanced lines of offence and a fourth that's better than most teams' third, but we don't see a proven superstar on any of them — and that could prove troublesome against teams like the Toronto Maple Leafs, Edmonton Oilers, Winnipeg Jets and Vancouver Canucks, who have some of the NHL's biggest game-breakers.

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.

Carey Price and Shea Weber are future Hall of Famers on the back end of their respective careers, but they're still top-end players who anchor a much-improved — and intimidating — line of defence.

Could that, coupled with the balance and depth of the forward group, mitigate not having the Marners, Matthews, McDavid, Draisaitl, Scheifele, Laine and Pettersons of the world? The Canadiens are banking on it.

A good start to the season will help reinforce the groundswell of positivity emanating from the front office. A bad one will raise all kinds of questions — and ratchet the pressure up several notches.

Still, Canadiens fans should feel really good about this team's chances. The prospect of winning hasn't been this palpable since Bergevin took over in 2012.

Why Toffoli believes Canadiens can 'make some noise' in the playoffs

X-Factor: Nick Suzuki

He may not be a superstar just yet, but Suzuki could very well go from really good player to star player this season — even if it's only his second in the NHL.

We're talking about a brilliant and offensively gifted player who idolizes Patrice Bergeron and plays very much in his image. A very important player.

Suzuki's starting on a line with Jonathan Drouin and Anderson — a versatile line with serious offensive potential — and he's running the top unit of a revamped Canadiens power play and also likely to be a member of the penalty kill. As a player who will be relied on in every situation, and one expected to produce consistently, much of what the Canadiens have planned for this season rides on Suzuki's success.

What we've learned about Suzuki is that, for as humble and shy as he appears in his interactions with the media, he won't cower to that pressure. The London, Ont., native is extremely competitive and he's very confident and aware of how good he is and how good he can be.

It's a big part of the reason we don't believe Suzuki will be bitten by the much-dreaded sophomore jinx.

Julien believes Suzuki's maturity will help him avoid it, as well.

"You look at Nick Suzuki and you look at his whole — not his career in the NHL but his whole upbringing in junior hockey and everything else from Team Canada to his own team in his last year — and what he did and what he was able to bring; he's a pretty intelligent individual," said Julien earlier this week. "And we talked about him being a cerebral player as well — I think you see that in how he reacts in his demeanour. He's a humble individual and knows what's ahead of him in order to succeed. So he's a pretty mature individual for his age."

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

Suzuki will have to be wise beyond his years. No one goes through 56 games unblemished, and it'll be paramount he maintains his composure when adversity hits.

Provided Suzuki can do that, he'll be fine — and so will the Canadiens.

Player who could surprise: Jesperi Kotkaniemi

Not that expectations aren't already high for the 20-year-old who was drafted third overall by the Canadiens in 2018, it's just that most people are expecting Kotkaniemi to only take a step or two rather than a massive leap forward.

After all, the young Finn's sophomore season was a considerable step backward only salvaged by an impressive nine-and-a-half games in the Toronto bubble (he was ejected from one for this hit on Philadelphia's Travis Sanheim). So, thinking he's suddenly going to be a point-per-game producer seems far-fetched.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2021

Jake Allen impressed by Kotkaniemi's shot, but can't pronounce his name

But what if Kotkaniemi comes close to being one? What if he emerges as Montreal's best centre? What if he, Tyler Toffoli and Joel Armia find the chemistry that permits them to become a dominant line?

None of that is out of the question.

And if it all came to fruition, it would ease much of the pressure on Suzuki and give the Canadiens a look up the middle — with Phillip Danault still taking on the heavy assignments when Julien has the matchup advantage home ice affords — they haven't had in decades.

The promise at centre is already way higher than it has been in 25 years, but it can be fulfilled quicker than anticipated if Kotkaniemi vaults his way up the depth chart.

We're not putting it past him.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' duo of Holtby, Demko star in final simulated training camp game

Iain MacIntyre

January 10, 2021, 1:38 AM

VANCOUVER — One day after the Vancouver Canucks got their National Hockey League lineup together, the team got its National Hockey League goaltending together, too.

Netminders Braden Holtby and Thatcher Demko were the stars on Saturday as the Canucks staged their second -- and last -- simulated game of training camp, a 2-1 shootout win for the "Blues" that was decided by Elias Pettersson's post-and-in shot as the tie-breaker.

Without an exhibition game to help the goaltenders track pucks and see shots at NHL speed, it was important Holtby and Demko got everything they could out of these two intra-camp warmup games. Each played every minute of both tuneups, and each was significantly sharper on Saturday than he was in Wednesday's 6-4 game, which was also three periods of stop-time and NHL officiating, following full morning skates.

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

Adjusting to a dramatic turn in his career after spending the last decade with the Washington Capitals, Holtby has looked better by the day during camp and is likely to be the Canucks' starter when Vancouver opens its 56-game regular season with back-to-back games in Edmonton, beginning Wednesday.

He allowed only a penalty-shot goal to Justin Bailey early in the first period on Saturday and made a handful of excellent saves. Demko was beaten by a Brandon Sutter tap-in after Jake Virtanen weaved to the net with the puck in the second period as the "Whites" attacked five-on-four after Virtanen's initially point shot stung defenceman Jack Rathbone.

Having lost starting goalie Jacob Markstrom to the rival Calgary Flames in free agency, the Canucks' netminding will be a story — good or bad — all season. It's easily the least certain position on a team whose defence has been upgraded and forward lines are largely intact from last season and driven by young, offensive players.

In just his second full NHL season, Demko, 25, eventually will have to prove he can start at this level. And Holtby, 31, must show he can be the starter he was before a dismal final season in Washington. At least they'll

head into this extraordinary regular season feeling good about themselves.

If you missed tonight's stream (or tuned out...) here are the highlights (with audio!) #CanucksCamp | @TD_Canada pic.twitter.com/t3AiyDqTy6

— Vancouver #Canucks (@Canucks) January 10, 2021

BON MOTTE

Canucks winger Tyler Motte, who emerged in last summer's playoffs as something more than just an energy player, isn't trying to win a spot at camp; he's trying to earn a bigger role. But he was probably trying too hard on Saturday when he twice kicked the feet out from under players.

The second slew-foot victim, Adam Gaudette, got up and challenged Motte. It was the first fight of Canucks camp, not including Twitter.

Gaudette briefly went to the dressing room before returning to finish the game, but Jayce Hawryluk, upended by Motte into teammate Kole Lind in the second period, was unable to continue. Hawryluk is trying to earn a depth role, at least high enough to make the six-man taxi squad.

These practice games were intended to bring the highest intensity possible from players unable to vent aggression against real opponents until the regular season starts. Motte is already at playoff intensity.

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.

HAMONIC RETURNS

Defenceman Travis Hamonic, fulfilling the NHL-mandated one-week quarantine after agreeing to a professional tryout with the Canucks on the eve of training camp, should be cleared Sunday to practise with his new team.

Monday is scheduled as a day off, but there will be a final practice Tuesday before the Canucks charter to Edmonton. Hamonic and the Canucks already have a contract framed — believed to be a one-year deal for about \$1 million — and a job posting: replacing Chris Tanev as the defence-minded partner for Calder Trophy runnerup Quinn Hughes.

Minor-leaguer Jalen Chatfield was back alongside Hughes on Saturday after being bumped out of that spot by Brogan Rafferty for Friday's 23-man NHL practice. But if things go well for Hamonic Sunday and Tuesday, the former Calgary Flame will be lining up with Hughes on Wednesday.

NUMBERS CRUNCH

The Canucks are expected to reduce their training camp roster after Sunday's workouts. There really isn't much mystery to Vancouver's opening-night lineup, but coach Travis Green and the hockey-ops staff have critical decisions to make about the taxi squad, which essentially expands the Canucks' useable roster to 29 players from 23.

The Canucks, Flames and Edmonton Oilers will all operate this season at a disadvantage against the rest of the Canadian division because their American Hockey League teams are based in the United States. With the federal government's 14-day quarantine requirement for international travellers, the Utica Comets may as well be playing in a galaxy far, far away.

Any immediate help the Canucks need due to injuries or poor performance will have to come from the six-player taxi squad, which isn't large enough to accommodate all the options Green would like to have.

Among the 23-man NHL roster and taxi squad, the Canucks will have three goalies, including minor-leaguer Mike DiPietro. Of the other 26 spots, figure on Vancouver carrying 10 defencemen and 16 forwards.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2021

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TSN.CA / Simmonds eager to be Leafs' net-front guy

The Leafs are hoping Simmonds can bring a net-front presence to their lineup this season, so much so he'll be in that spot on Toronto's top power play unit to start the year, Kristen Shilton writes.

Kristen Shilton

The Maple Leafs held a pair of morning skates ahead of tonight's Blue & White Game at Scotiabank Arena.

It took some time for Wayne Simmonds to really tap into his potential as a net-front presence in the NHL, but once he got the hang of it, the 13-year veteran knew he'd found a calling.

"The evolution, it just continues," Simmonds told reporters on a Zoom call Saturday. "For me to get better year after year, that's more knowledge I have and more insight that I'm gaining. I'm a student of the game and I'm looking to learn every time I get a chance."

Not until he joined the Philadelphia Flyers in 2011 did Simmonds really feel his game in that area become stronger. After being drafted in the second round, 61st overall, by Los Angeles in 2007, he spent three seasons with the Kings from 2008-11 learning from some of the best net-front guys in the league, stealing as much information from them as he could.

"I got a chance to play behind guys like Ryan Smyth, who'd been one of the greatest net-front presences in the NHL, and Michal Handzus as well," Simmonds said. "I picked those guys' brains a lot throughout the three years that I was in Los Angeles and Smyth would help me out a tremendous amount. Then going into Philly I got the chance to work with Scott Hartnell and learned some tricks of the trade from there. I started to make plays in front of the net, and not only are you there as a screen but you're there for tipping, and you're there to make those little plays and puck retrievals."

Beyond just his own teammates, Simmonds said he also admires a forward like Corey Perry, and watches his game closely.

"The way that he does things in front of the net, how slick he is, the patience that he has," Simmonds said. "Those are guys that I've picked up some tips off of."

The Leafs are hoping Simmonds can bring those same elements to their lineup this season, so much so he'll be the net-front guy on Toronto's top power play unit to start the year.

"[Wayne] has got a great history of producing from the net front, whether that's he himself scoring, or just contributing because of the issues that a good net-front presence can cause for the goaltending and the penalty killers," said head coach Sheldon Keefe. "So we want to give him that opportunity. Obviously it expands his role with us and that's important...and with [assistant coach] Manny [Malhotra] coming over here with his [power play] plan and prioritizing the net-front, it was something that he wanted to do right from the start."

Keefe was already quite familiar with Simmonds' expertise before Toronto even signed him to a one-year, \$1.5 million contract in October. Back when Keefe was coaching with the Canadian Junior Hockey League's Pembroke Lumber Kings, Simmonds was skating for the Brockville Braves, and during the 2005-06 season, he had a couple memorable interactions with his future head coach's club.

"Pembroke was the number one team in the league at that point," Simmonds recalled. "I remember I had just got in the league and I scored

the OT winner to walk the boys off [against Pembroke], so that was pretty exciting. And [another time], we were up in Pembroke and I remember I had a dull skate and they wouldn't let me sharpen my skates, so I had to beat one of his players up [on the ice] just to get off."

Chuckling at the recollection, Keefe admitted he didn't know about the gamesmanship from his staff but did vividly recall Simmonds' fight.

"I remember the part where he beat somebody up," Keefe laughed. "The part about the skate I was not aware of but he did inform me of that the first time we met here, before he had signed with us. I actually brought up the fight. He brought up the backstory to it. We had an unbelievable equipment manager back there in Pembroke, he was as competitive as they come. So, I would imagine that was definitely a true story."

It might just be an intra-squad scrimmage on paper, but if Saturday's Blue & White game is executed properly the Leafs will be taking a whole lot more out of it than an average practice tilt.

"In my mind, this is sort of the culmination of the [training] camp," Keefe said. "It'll end here today and we'll come back and [have] two practice days before we play Montreal [on Wednesday]. So we'll sort of be moving into the next phase."

While Keefe felt there was more his group had to offer after last Wednesday's camp scrimmage, he's pleased overall with how Toronto has performed to date and hopes to see that carry over into Saturday.

"Guys have put in lots of work, and we hope that will translate to the ice. I believe that it will in this setting," Keefe said. "I think all the different things around it, with NHL officials, [it's a] televised game, all those kind of things we think will add the necessary competitiveness that you would hope to get out of an exhibition setting and allow us to push on to the next phase as we prep for regular season."

The Leafs will play three 20-minute periods in the game, with a shootout following the first and second periods and a five-minute OT at the end regardless of score. It'll be a final tune-up not only for the players, but the coaching staff as well.

"Myself, [Dave] Hakstol and Manny will work together as a staff for the first two periods, spend[ing] one period with each team," Keefe said. "And then we'll probably split it up again from there for the third, and then [assistant coach] Paul MacLean and [Toronto Marlies' head coach] Greg Moore will work the bench opposite us three."

Toronto has gone to great pains making Saturday's contest feel as regular season-like as possible, and those efforts are greatly appreciated around the Leafs' room, particularly for the new guys.

"With no exhibition games this year, it's tough to get in that mindset of real games coming from the summer," said T.J. Brodie, who signed a four-year, \$20 million contract with Toronto in October. "So I think games like tonight will be big to get back into that and get a little bit more physical and get the battles going. Just the intensity [will be ramped up]. Wednesday's scrimmage was sort of a mix between an exhibition game and [a camp] scrimmage, so I think just ramping it up to having it be more like a game is what we want [tonight]."

—

Toronto was an abysmal 1-5-7 in the shootout last season, ranking 28th overall in the NHL, and Keefe has made a point of addressing that head-on in training camp.

"Without a doubt, it's something we had talked a lot about," he said. "It's something we want to give our guys a real proper opportunity to practise and try to do it in game settings as much as we can. So while we can set the parameters a little bit here [for Saturday's scrimmage], we want to make sure to get those reps. We've also done it in practice and our practice scrimmages."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2021

With the NHL's alignment changing this season and the Leafs set to face only their six other North Division opponents for the entire 56-game schedule, losing out on even a single point could prove devastating in the long run.

"We're in a season where all of the points are going to remain in the division, so the shootout and overtime for that matter are really important even more so than a normal time," Keefe said. "When you're playing outside the division, you feel like maybe the extra point isn't as substantial if you were to lose it. But here, when the point stays in the division every game, it's amplified that much more."

Keefe has incorporated shootout opportunities everywhere in the last week, including to determine whether Team Blue or Team White would get to use the Leafs' main dressing room during Saturday's game. At the end of their morning skate, Team White won a five-puck battle to earn the honour.

—

Brodie said early on in Leafs' camp that his new defensive partner Morgan Rielly reminded him a lot of his former partner in Calgary, Mark Giordano. So perhaps it's not too surprising that after a week of playing together in camp, Brodie is feeling pretty strongly about his pairing.

"It's been going good. Morgan's an easy guy to play with," Brodie said. "He does everything so well that it's pretty easy to read him and he's so skilled, you just let him do his thing out there."

Along with other newcomers Zach Bogosian and Mikko Lehtonen, Brodie has been feeling out the Leafs' blueline schemes and found them to be right up his alley.

"Some of the stuff is very similar to what I've been used to, so it's not too much of an adjustment," Brodie. "But it's tough [to assess yourself] until you get in a real game and guys are banging you. Hopefully that's what tonight will be used for, [to make things more] physical and game-like; it definitely helps you get ready for the real thing."

TSN.CA LOADED: 01.10.2021

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USA TODAY / Two-time Stanley Cup winning goalie Corey Crawford announces retirement

Mike Brehm

Two-time Stanley Cup-winning goaltender Corey Crawford announced his retirement Saturday, shortly after starting training camp with the New Jersey Devils.

Crawford, 36, won Stanley Cups in 2013 and 2015 during his 10 full seasons with the Chicago Blackhawks. He became their No. 1 goalie in 2010-11 and made the All-Rookie team that year.

He had signed a two-year, \$7.8 million contract with New Jersey in the offseason after the Blackhawks said they wouldn't be re-signing him. He had missed practice the past five days, and the Devils announced Friday that he was taking indefinite leave for personal reasons.

"I have been fortunate to have had a long career playing professional hockey for a living," Crawford said in a statement. "I wanted to continue my career, but believe I've given all I can to the game of hockey, and I have decided that it is time to retire."

"I would like to thank the New Jersey Devils organization for understanding and supporting my decision. I would like to thank the

Chicago Blackhawks organization for giving me the chance to live my childhood dream.

"I am proud to have been part of winning two Stanley Cups in Chicago. Thank you to all of my teammates and coaches throughout the years. Also, thank you to the fans who make this great game what it is. I am happy and excited to move on to the next chapter of my life with my family."

He finishes his career with a 260-162-53 record, 2.45 goals-against average and .918 save percentage. He won the Jennings Trophy for lowest team goals-against average in 2012-13 and 2014-15 and led the league with seven shutouts in 2015-16, but he was limited to 28 games in 2017-18 because of vertigo.

"Corey has an unforgettable place within our organization, in our fans' hearts and in Chicago sports history," the Blackhawks and the Wirtz family said in a statement. "We congratulate Corey on a Hall of Fame-worthy playing career."

USA TODAY LOADED: 01.10.2021