



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 7, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes forward Martin Necas could return soon from injury against Blackhawks

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes forward Martin Necas, injured Thursday against the Chicago Blackhawks, could return to the lineup soon, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour indicated Saturday.

Brind'Amour, asked Saturday if Necas was in the concussion protocol, said, "He's going to be out for a little while but I don't think it's going to be very long. I'm not really sure what they're calling it but we're definitely keeping him out here for a little while."

Necas was injured when he was hit along the boards by defenseman Calvin de Haan and then fell to the ice. It is being termed an "upper-body" injury.

Necas has a goal and four assists in the first eight games for the Canes (6-2-0) and scored the overtime winner against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Jan. 28. He has been used on the power play and recently in penalty killing.

Necas joins goalie Petr Mrazek, a fellow Czech and good friend, on the injury list. Mrazek is out for an indefinite period after a thumb injury that required surgery.

With Necas out, Brind'Amour had Teuvo Teravainen on Vincent Trocheck's line with Nino Niederreiter at Saturday's practice at the Wake Competition Center. Teravainen recently returned from the NHL COVID-19 protocol list.

Forward Jesper Fast, who also has been on the COVID list, was at practice Saturday. Fast said he suffered some light COVID symptoms for a few days and was "climbing the walls" to get out of quarantine and get back to the team.

"When the coach thinks I'm ready I'll be ready to go," Fast said on the media call.

The Canes have road games against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Sunday and Monday, then go to Dallas for two games.



Gold: Canes hope to be super in Columbus

By Adam Gold

For all of their speed, skill and skating ability, the Carolina Hurricanes aren't all that interested in flying up and down the ice and trading chances. Tuesday and Thursday, the Chicago Blackhawks drew the Canes into that type of game and Carolina was pretty fortunate to escape with two points.

Both of them came on Tuesday thanks to Andrei Svechnikov's shootout goal that made a winner of James Reimer. Thursday, the result wasn't as appetizing, as Carolina's penalty kill was abused by Chicago's non-stop motion power play and the Hurricanes were forced to chase the game all night long. That they drew even two different times is a testament to the quality team the Canes are, but in the end, Chicago was able to take advantage of a defensive zone lapse in concentration and stop Carolina's winning streak at five.

Now, in the first of a back-to-back set in Columbus, against a club Carolina didn't beat in three tries a year ago, the Hurricanes take on the team that is as close to the polar opposite of what they just encountered in the Blue Jackets. John Tortorella's club is an in-your-face, all-out, forechecking machine and they make you earn everything you get.

At least that's the plan.

Hasn't really worked out that way for the Blue Jackets so far. Every advanced metric shows Columbus to be one of the

worst teams in the league. Shot share, scoring chances, expected goals, you name it and the Jackets are near the bottom of the league in it. But somehow, after dropping their first two games of the season, they've gotten points in 8 of their last 10 games and they've done what they've always done, scrap their way to wins.

According to Hockey-reference.com, the Blue Jackets are 3rd in the league in something called "axDiff". The difference between expected goal differential and their actual 5-on-5 goal differential. What that means is either the Jackets are converting their chances at a higher rate or their goaltenders are stopping those against them. In this case, it's the latter. Between Joonas Korpi and Elvis Merslickins, who are basically the same goalie according to their statistics, Columbus has allowed just 6 of 34 (.824) "high danger" shots through.

In contrast, Carolina's tandem of James Reimer and Petr Mrazek have yielded goals on 4 of 18 (.778) of those even strength opportunities.

Now, we'll see how much those numbers change with Patrik Laine playing his 3rd game for Columbus. He's scored once in the two game split with Dallas and was skating with Max Domi and Alexandre Texier on the top line. Texier and Oliver Bjorkstrand lead the team with four goals apiece, with Bjorkstrand topping the Jackets in points with 10 in 12



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games. Laine has scored six goals in eight career games against the Hurricanes.

Ins and outs...

Canes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said Saturday that the Canes would be without forward Martin Necas for a "little while". Though he added that he didn't think it would be for very long. However, any time you see someone's head bounce on the ice, I think it's fair to say that a quick return would be a surprise. Hopefully, we'll all be surprised, because Necas was looking like a player that was about to push the dominance button.

Jesper Fast figures to draw back into the line up after spending time on the Covid-19 protocol list. The Canes' lone free agent signing is scoreless in three games and it will be interesting to see where Brind'Amour slots Fast in the line up.

Judging from the team's Zoom availability on Saturday, it appears likely that Alex Nedeljkovic may get his first start of the season. The Parma, Ohio native made four appearances a year ago, and was at his best in his final start, a 4-2 win in Pittsburgh in which he stopped 28 of 30 Penguins shots on goal.

Today's specials?

The Blue Jackets are not elite on the power play, having converted just 4 of 32 tries. They're 1 for 6 with Laine in the fold. But, Carolina is limping on the penalty kill right now, having been torched for four of their six power play goals allowed in just the last two games. Lets hope that's more about Chicago than Carolina.

After scoring four power play goals in the 2-game sweep of the Stars, the Canes were shut out in five tries in Chicago.

(Not so) Big Three

Carolina's top trio of Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen and Andrei Svechnikov have combined for just 7 goals in 39 games played against the Blue Jackets -- and six of them are Aho's. Svech has just one assist in seven career games

against Columbus while Turbo has netted just one goal in 17 starts.

Returns

The first 17 saves of Nedeljkovic's career came in Columbus. On January 17, 2017 Ned backed up Cam Ward and came on in the middle of the second period after Ward allowed four goals. Ned didn't yield anything in the eventual 4-1 loss. I'm sure that Nationwide Arena will provide for some happy memories, and maybe even a few friendly faces, since his hometown is just a 2 hour drive away.

The building will not elicit warm fuzzies for Dougie Hamilton. Last January 16th was the date his Norris Trophy-caliber season came to a screeching halt when he suffered a broken leg during a center ice collision with Jackets forward Kevin Stenlund late in the 2nd period. Dougie is still looking for his first goal of the season. He does have six assists and a +4 rating through eight games, so it's not all bad.

Super Sunday

The Hurricanes have a 2-3-1-1 (tie, yes that used to be a thing in the NHL) record on Super Bowl Sunday. In all, four of the seven games have gone beyond the regulation 60 minutes, so if you're planning to catch Jazmine Sullivan and Eric Church belt out the national anthem, you might need a second screen.

Last year, the Canes beat Vancouver, 4-3, in a shootout last year, snapping a 3-game Super Skid. In all, Their only other win was on February 5 of 2006 when they also needed penalties to beat the Boston Bruins on the road.

Game time is 3:08 at The United Center in Chicago. Air time on 99.9 the Fan starts with Storm Watch starring Alec Campbell at 2:30. Mike Maniscalco and Tripp Tracy have the call of the action. Following the game, Alec will have the Aftermath and don't forget to subscribe to the Aluminum Company of North Carolina Canes Corner podcast which drops the morning after every Hurricanes game, though it should be ready for you at halftime of the Chiefs-Bucs, if you're not into The Weekend.



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Canes Reset in Raleigh Before Back-to-Back in Columbus

Fast set to return to the lineup

By Michael Smith

The wind gusted as the Carolina Hurricanes boarded the plane on a snow-covered tarmac in Chicago on Thursday night.

It made an already icy night even more frigid, the cold snap gripping the Canes just as reality had earlier that night at the rink.

The Canes saw their five-game winning streak end in a 6-4 loss to the Chicago Blackhawks. The team didn't have its usual swagger. The penalty kill was uncharacteristically penetrable, and the power play sputtered. The Canes were out of sync and, really, just not very good.

"We didn't play how we want to play, our identity," Dougie Hamilton said. "We need to be better. It's a little bit of a wake-up call for us."

Traveling back to Raleigh in between their two-game set in Chicago and a back-to-back in Columbus allowed the Canes to breathe and press the reset button.

Instead of sitting around in a hotel on Friday, they spent a day off with family at home, away from the rink.

"You're always focused on the next day. ... We're not going to dwell on it too much," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said on Thursday. "There's a way we have to play to be successful, and we have to get back to it."

The team was back on the ice at Wake Competition Center on Saturday morning with a chance to course correct and reestablish their identity.

But let's zoom out. The Canes are 6-2-0, and their .750 points percentage is third-best in the Central Division.

It's certainly no time to press the panic button, but the fact that the Canes recognize deficiencies in their game and aren't content with the state of the team underscores the championship mentality that lives and breathes in the locker room.

"The last two games have been just OK. I think this team has a long way to go, but we're certainly on the right direction.

We have great leaders on the team," offered Justin Williams, now a member of the front office, when he was asked his thoughts on the season. "Once everybody plays catch-up, we're one of the best teams in the league."

The Canes have cleared their early-season COVID-19 hurdles, with Jesper Fast, the last addition to the protocol list, back at practice on Saturday and set to return to the lineup on Sunday.

Fast said he was "climbing the walls" in his room while waiting out a "boring" and "not the most fun" quarantine period.

"I'm happy to be out now, and I'm feeling good," he said.

The Canes' injury list swelled on Thursday with the addition of Martin Necas, whose helmeted head bounced off the ice after a clean but heavy hit from former teammate Calvin de Haan late in regulation. Though he was around the practice facility on Saturday, he did not practice or travel to Columbus with the team.

"He's going to be out for a little while, but I don't think it's going to be very long," Brind'Amour said of Necas' upper-body injury.

The injury list also includes Max McCormick (upper body) and Petr Mrazek, who underwent surgery on his right thumb last week and whose return timetable should be clearer in the coming days.

Alex Nedeljkovic is likely to get a start during the Canes' back-to-back set in Columbus. Nedeljkovic, a native of Parma, Ohio, made his NHL debut in Columbus on Jan. 17, 2017, when he made 17 saves on 17 shots in a relief appearance.

"It'd be awesome if the fans were there and I could have some family down. It would obviously be a lot more special. But any time you can play close to home, it's something cool," he said. "I grew up watching those guys. It will be a fun time if I can get in one."

The Canes and Blue Jackets face off at 3 p.m. on Sunday, followed by a 7 p.m. puck drop on Monday.



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Preview: Hurricanes at Blue Jackets

Canes meet old Metro Division foe for back-to-back

By Michael Smith

COLUMBUS - It's the big game before the big game as the Carolina Hurricanes face off with the Columbus Blue Jackets in the first half of a back-to-back set.

The Match-Up

Carolina Hurricanes (6-2-0, 12 points) at Columbus Blue Jackets (5-4-3, 13 points)

Sunday, Feb. 7, 3 p.m.

Watch: FOX Sports Carolinas, FOX Sports GO

Listen: 99.9 FM The Fan, Hurricanes.com/Listen, Hurricanes app

Tracking the Storylines

Fast Set to Return to the Lineup: After landing on the COVID-19 Protocol list two weeks ago, Jesper Fast is now ready to jump back into game action. Fast practiced with the Canes on Saturday in Raleigh and skated on a line with Jordan Martinook and Morgan Geekie.

"A little boring to be locked inside for two weeks, but I'm happy to be out now, and I'm feeling good," Fast said after practice. "Watching the team play has been a joy. They definitely brought a smile to my face, except last game."

Join the Nedvolution: Alex Nedeljkovic is could make his first start of the season in this series. A native of Parma, Ohio, Nedeljkovic made his NHL debut on Jan. 17, 2017, in Columbus, a relief appearance in which he made 17 saves

on 17 shots. His first NHL start came a year later on Jan. 23, 2018, in Vancouver, when he turned aside 24 of 26 shots in his first victory. He appeared in four games last season just prior to the pause and is 2-2-1 in his career.

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The Opposition

2019-20 record: 33-22-15, 81 points (.579 points %), 6th in Metropolitan Division

CAR vs. CBJ in 2019-20: 0-2-1

2019-20 leading scorer: Pierre-Luc Dubois, 49 points (18g, 31a) in 70 games

Key additions: Patrik Laine (RW), Jack Roslovic (C), Max Domi (C), Mikko Koivu (C)

Key subtractions: Pierre-Luc Dubois (LW), Josh Anderson (RW), Alexander Wennberg (C)

The Blue Jackets made a trade splash early in the season when they dealt Pierre-Luc Dubois to the Winnipeg Jets in exchange for Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic. Laine scored his first goal with Columbus on Feb. 4 against Dallas. Roslovic also scored his first with the Jackets on Feb. 4, while he's added another three assists in his last three games.

Columbus, the only other Metropolitan Division team joining Carolina in the new-look Central, has split each of its last two-game series and sits at 5-4-3 on the season.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

They said it: Jesper Fast, Alex Nedeljkovic, and Rod Brind'Amour speak after practice

Carolina will get their key free agent signing Jesper Fast back soon. He, Alex Nedeljkovic, and Rod Brind'Amour spoke to the media on Saturday.

By Brett Finger

The Carolina Hurricanes returned home for a scheduled practice at Wake Competition Center on Saturday before continuing their road trip through Columbus on Sunday.

After the team's practice, Rod Brind'Amour, Alex Nedeljkovic, and Jesper Fast spoke to the media over Zoom:

Rod Brind'Amour

On Martin Necas and whether he is concussed: I can't (say whether he is concussed or not). He's going to be out for a little while, but I don't think it's going to be very long. I'm not really sure what they're calling it (the injury), but we're definitely keeping him out here for a little while.

On Justin Williams re-joining the organization as a Special Advisor to the GM: I think any time you have good people around, I don't care what business you're in, you're going to find a way to be successful. We know his hockey IQ is really high. Like I said, it's good to have that kind of people in the building and in the organization. I'm not really sure and I don't think anyone is really sure how much he's going to do or not, but we welcome him obviously in the mix.

On if the Slavin-Pesce pairing seen in practice will translate to the game: I mean, it's always an option. I wouldn't read too much into the lines today. We were just kinda looking at a little different things, but we know that can be a great pairing for us moving forward. I'm not sure it's going to start that way tomorrow.

On if the team's game will change when Alex Nedeljkovic gets a start and how his puck-moving ability helps: Your game doesn't change, you just hope it gets better with a



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good puck-moving goalie. That's what his strength is and he needs to do it. As far as when he plays, I'm not sure, but he will definitely get in here, I'm sure sometime soon. He better be doing that (moving the puck), it's one of the things he does well. He better be handling the puck.

Alex Nedeljkovic

On potentially getting the opportunity to play in his home state of Ohio: It'd be pretty cool. It'd be awesome if fans were there, we'd have family down and it'd obviously be more special. Any time you can play close to home, it's cool. I grew up watching those guys. It'll be a fun time if I can get into one.

On getting another chance at the NHL level: It's a good opportunity. It sucks that it had to be with somebody getting hurt. Obviously, Petr having surgery is never something that you want for anybody, but hopefully, he'll have a quick recovery and I can help hold down the fort while he's gone.

On avoiding putting pressure on himself after not playing in so long: Paul (Schonfelder, Canes goalie coach) and I were talking about it during camp, actually. You just have to take every practice as a game, really. Obviously, the intensity's not the same for everybody but you have to do your best to make it as game-like as possible. You're going to give up goals in practice, you're going to give up goals in games, but you just have to play it out as best you can. Play every rebound out and just try to be as precise as you can be.

On having to go through waivers at the beginning of the season: It was my first time going through (waivers). I'd say it

was a little stressful - not even for me, but just my girlfriend and everyone kinda around like my family. Just the uncertainty of it all. The next morning, if you wake up and you're with another organization, you're trying to figure out flights and living situations. I was actually pretty happy to stay here. It's the only organization I've known. I'm familiar with everybody and everybody kinda knows who I am. It would've been nice to maybe go to a new spot and get some fresh eyes, but I know what I have here and they know what they have in me. Just having that confidence that I can come in and step in and do my job to my best.

Jesper Fast

On how he is feeling after coming off of the COVID protocol list and how close he is to being able to play: I feel good. Today was my first time back practicing with the team, so I was happy to be out there. We'll see, when the coaches think I'm ready, I'll be ready to go.

On if he had any COVID complications: The first two days, I felt it, but after that, it was just like a cold so nothing too bad. It was getting a little boring being locked inside for two weeks but I'm glad to be out now and I'm feeling good.

On how he occupied himself in self-isolation: I was climbing the walls in the room where I was. It was not eh most fun. Watching the team play, it's been a joy. They definitely put a smile to my face, except for last game, but other than that it's such a joy to watch them play.



Wolves rally past Rockford

Rookie center Seth Jarvis scored two goals set up by rookie Jamieson Rees as the Chicago Wolves erased an early deficit to claim a 5-4 road win over the Rockford IceHogs on Saturday afternoon.

Center Rem Pitlick produced the game-winning goal while defenseman Cavan Fitzgerald and forward Tanner Jeannot also scored for the Wolves (2-0-0-0), who won their second game in a 21-hour span and ruined Rockford's season opener.

Goaltender Jeremy Helvig (1-0-0) posted 28 saves in his Wolves debut to pick up his second career American Hockey League win.

Rockford (0-1-0-0) started quickly with power-play goals on each of its first two advantages. John Quenneville and Chad

Yetnam delivered to give the IceHogs a 2-0 lead 8:25 into the game.

The Wolves bounced back to seize a 2-2 tie before the first 20 minutes ended. Rees, a 19-year-old forward playing his second game as a pro, went coast-to-coast down the right wing and tried to jam the puck past goaltender Matt Tomkins (31 saves). Tomkins left the rebound in the crease and Jarvis cleaned it up at 17:22.

One minute later, Fitzgerald unleashed a blast from the left circle as center Tom Novak, skating backward down the right side, spied the wide-open Fitzgerald and delivered a perfect pass for the 2-2 tie.

Rockford regained the lead on its third power-play goal in as many chances — a blast by Wyatt Kalynuk at the 4:36 mark — but Jeannot responded just 35 seconds later with his own



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power-play goal. Defenseman Alex Carrier rifled a shot off the back boards that bounced into the slot and Jeannot rushed in to lift it over Tomkins' right shoulder.

Then Rees and Jarvis teamed up again to give the Wolves the lead for good. Rees took a Joey Keane pass in the defensive zone, then used his speed and agility to slalom his way through the defense and attack the net. Jarvis met him in the crease and stuffed home a short pass to make it 4-3 at the 8:10 mark of the second — the 2020 NHL first-round draft pick's third goal in two pro games.

Pitlick made it 5-3 with five minutes left in the second as he broke up a pass in the defensive zone, won the race to the puck and beat Tomkins top-shelf on a breakaway.

Rockford's Matej Chapula cut the Wolves' margin to 5-4 with 10:33 to play, but Chicago killed a 6-on-4 situation in the final two minutes to preserve the victory.

The Wolves return to the ice 2 p.m. Tuesday when they host Rockford at the Chicago Wolves Training Facility at Triphahn Center in Hoffman Estates. The teams added the game to their schedules Friday.

While fans can't attend games at Triphahn Center this season, their smiling faces can be in the building with a personalized cutout in the Chicago Wolves Fan Gallery, presented by Hefty. To purchase yours, visit ChicagoWolvesStore.com.

TODAY'S LINKS

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

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Hurricanes forward Martin Necas could return soon from injury against Blackhawks

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

FEBRUARY 06, 2021 12:53 PM

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Wheeler's 2021 NHL prospect pool rankings: No. 5 Carolina Hurricanes

By Scott Wheeler

Feb 6, 2021

Welcome to Scott Wheeler's 2021 rankings of every NHL organization's prospects. You can find the complete ranking and more information on the criteria here, as we count down daily from No. 31 to No. 1. The series, which includes my own evaluations and commentary from coaches and staff on more than 500 prospects, runs from Jan. 11 to Feb. 9.

The Hurricanes' prospect pool is the highest-ranked system in the NHL this year not to have either recently been through a rebuild or currently in one.

They have clearly demonstrated, particularly at the last two drafts but also through trades, an ability to see value in prospects that other teams don't, targeting primarily high-talent players who are notably different (see: Dom Fensore, Zion Nybeck) or those who are polarizing within the scouting community for one reason or another (see: Antoni Honka, Patrik Puustola, Dominik Bokk, Noel Gunler, Jamieson Rees).

If you've followed my draft boards in recent years you'll know that they're also the team that drafts most in line with the way I approach player evaluation. The Hurricanes' focus is clear. They covet problem-solvers who can play finesse, possession games. Their consistent emphasis on skill doesn't stray, using the draft as a mechanism to take swings on high-upside players. They recognize that top-of-the-lineup players are tougher to acquire outside of the draft than the readily available depth pieces that can be acquired through trades and free agents. And they take swings, betting that the hits will be meaningful enough that they can live with some misses.

Though there has been a lot of change over in their pool and they don't have a top-10 draft pick in the bunch, the Hurricanes have hung onto their draft choices and found creative ways to replace outgoing talent with equal (or better) incoming talent. This year, out due to a combination of trade or age are Janne Kuokkanen, Julien Gauthier, Eetu Luostarinen, and David Cotton. In are six of their eight 2020 draft selections and Joey Keane, who was acquired by trade.

2020 prospect pool rank: No. 3 (change: -2)

1. Seth Jarvis, C/RW, 19 (Portland Winterhawks/Chicago Wolves)

Jarvis was a little quieter than I expected he'd be at Team Canada's selection camp for the world juniors. He flashed a few times, especially as a playmaker in traffic, but he had to pop as an 18-year-old to crack that team and he wasn't consistently dangerous. Only two of Team Canada's forwards (Cole Perfetti and Quinton Byfield, who could both be in the NHL) are eligible to return to next year's team though, so Jarvis should be a lock — and could play high in the lineup. The more video work I do on Jarvis (including some recent viewings for this project), the more I fall in love with his star potential. Jarvis is a multi-faceted offensive zone creator who can manufacture looks for himself or use his puck skill to bait defenders and delay until seams get open as a playmaker. He excels in high-traffic, high-pace scenarios, carrying the puck with some flair, carving teams up through lanes, staying agile on his edges, and burning defenders on cuts. He's also the kind of player who is going to thrive with talent around him at the NHL level. And while he's not explosive or powerful, his A-level skating and skill are complemented by a diligent off-puck game that uses his three-stride acceleration to win races, escape board battles with control, and track the play to provide

support above the puck. Outside of being a light 5-foot-10, Jarvis has all of the tools needed to become an impact top-six forward.

2. Ryan Suzuki, C, 19 (Saginaw Spirit/Chicago Wolves)

One of my only criticisms of Suzuki's game over the years has been his tendency to try to do too much, to try the extra move unnecessarily. So what was the one thing he did better than anything else at the world juniors? He made quick decisions on reads under pressure and played within himself. The world juniors version of Suzuki was the best version of his game. Suzuki has always had the line-driving on-puck skill of a top-six NHL talent. He leads rushes and pushes pace through neutral ice as a primary carrier on his line, hitting the blue line with speed to make something happen. He can beat defenders and goalies one-on-one with his hands, particularly his unique ability to pull and drag pucks through his feat and across his body to leap around opposing players with a side-step or cut. He's also a creative, inventive passer who can run a power play, execute through layers, and feed pucks into space for his linemates. His quick acceleration also gives him defensive value in races and on lifts when he commits to them (an area which has improved a great deal since he entered the OHL as a No. 1 pick). Suzuki doesn't have the overall build or strength of his brother, which limits his defensive value and his scoring ability relative to Nick, but I don't think either of those things are preventative and I see legitimate second-line upside in Ryan Suzuki's game.

3. Jake Bean, LHD, 22 (Carolina Hurricanes/Chicago Wolves)

The strength of the Hurricanes' defence kept Bean out of the NHL longer than his skill set and play otherwise deserved, and now that he's in the NHL the strength of their defence is keeping him out of a regular spot in the lineup and the minutes he's capable of playing when he does get in. I applaud his patience because there are other players who would have wanted out by now. Though he has played in just three games this season as I write this, he has looked like the possession-driving two-way defender that he is and the Canes, per Natural Stat Trick, have outshot (20-11, or 64.5 SF%) and out-attempted (39-23, or 62.9 CF%) the opposition at five-on-five, with a 66.8 expected goals for percentage (xGF%). Bean is a smooth, mobile, shot-generating 6-foot-1 defender who thrives in transition, can make plays off of the offensive zone blue line, and plays with equal parts patience and aggression. He has legitimate power play upside for the NHL with his ability to weave through the neutral zone and then make things happen with his footwork, hard point shot, and impressive reads. And while he's not going to be a shutdown defender at even-strength, Bean has the pro attributes needed to defend the rush, close gaps, and hold his own in board battles. Despite his age and his slow escalation up the ranks, I still see legitimate second-pairing upside.

4. Noel Gunler, RW/LW, 19 (Brynäs IF)

After making the move from Luleå to Brynäs, Gunler left one of the top teams in the SHL for a bigger opportunity with its last-place club. Now, in 13 minutes a night (instead of seven minutes a night), he's playing at a half a point per game and factoring in on the team's power play after a strong showing at the world juniors, where he scored three highlight-reel goals in five games. Gunler's has always produced offensively at an elite level relative to his age group and his SHL minutes, but concerns over his commitment off the puck led to his fall into the second round at the 2020 draft (when he was clearly a first-round talent) and shrouded his time in Brynäs and resulted in some Team Sweden snubs. Gunler's offensive skill pops. His shot in motion and from a standstill is lethal, generating significant torque through his stick and slinging off of his blade with a ton of spin. He protects the puck extremely well on his backhand, which helps him drop a shoulder and cut to the net to shoot off of his forehand on his off-wing. He's always looking to shoot high but he rarely misses the net. Some scouts question his skating but he creates separation and breakaways for himself too consistently for me to argue against his straight-line speed (even if his stride can splay a little and he can pick up his stick into a pitchfork skating stride when he's really pushing himself). Others question his consistency and his play off the puck even though he has consistently driven results at both ends at an



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early age in terms of possession, chances, and goals at five-on-five relative to his teams. He's got a pro frame, an excellent feel with the puck, and significant power-play value.

With team Sweden at the world juniors, he played the flank on the power play and scored short-side bar down not once ...

... but twice.

With Brynäs, he has played the slot role equally successful though, showcasing his ability to get finish from in tight with one touch when his feet aren't quite so set. Watch the way he gets low to leverage this low shot:

Or the way he gets low and gets this puck up instead:

Or even the way he adjusts his approach to make a quick one-touch pass when he's too closely covered to shoot here:

With the right coaching and development, Gunler has the potential to be an impact goal scorer in the NHL. Outside of names like Arthur Kaliyev, Cole Caufield and Alexander Holtz, he's one of the better shooting prospects in the sport. He's exactly the kind of player you roll the dice on in the second round.

5. Jack Drury, C, 21 (Växjö Lakers HC)

Drury doesn't have some of the dynamic qualities many of the other Canes prospects ranked here do but with each passing season he feels like more of a sure thing than many of them do. He was the fourth-most productive player in college hockey last season (1.39 points per game) and its second-most productive goal scorer (0.71 goals per game, trailing only Sharks forward John Leonard). This year, when Harvard cancelled its season due to the pandemic, Drury turned pro and signed in the SHL, where he has been the league's second-most productive under-21 forward (0.71 points per game, trailing only Red Wings prospect Jonatan Berggren) and most productive rookie, playing 18 minutes per game (which also leads all forward rookies) on the best team in the league. Drury has always been known as a driven, 200-foot centre who involves himself in the play, plays within his team's structure without cheating, works to get the puck back, and excels at moulding his game to play alongside talented wingers. But his offensive skill has also developed along a steep trajectory, with above-average tools across the board as a finisher, handler, and passer who create offence in a variety of ways.

Focus on No. 13 in blue (he begins the sequence on the right side of your screen high in the offensive zone) above-puck positioning as the third forward here below. He stays in position above the puck and only involves himself in the play when he has to close off the zone, disrupting at the right time and then getting open to use that finishing skill:

But notice the creative little behind-the-back bank pass off of the boards to a teammate early on in this sequence, too:

6. Jamieson Rees, C/LW, 19 (Chicago Wolves/Sarnia Sting)

Rees didn't make Team Canada at the world juniors but he couldn't have played any better than he did in the scrimmages and was clearly one of the most noticeable players before being one of the final cuts. When Rees plays like he did in the selection camp, his talent and pesky forechecking style shine through equally and his presence is felt on every shift. He can impact a game in so many ways, whether he's hunting down loose pucks, fighting for body positioning to win battles against bigger players, making something happen at the front of the net, or circling the offensive zone in possession to facilitate or cut to the slot for a chance. Rees is a slippery stickhandler who changes directions on defenders to keep cycles alive but also has a ton of talent in traffic to the slot. He plays on the edge when he doesn't have the puck and surprises defenders and goalies with his hands when he has it (though there are times when he tries to do too much). He's a better passer than finisher, and he's not the biggest kid in the world, but he plays a pro style and if he can learn to reign in some of his decisions better he'll have value up and down an NHL lineup someday.

7. Antoni Honka, RHD, 20 (JYP)

On a JYP team that sits at the bottom of the Liiga standings, Honka is clearly the team's most talented defenceman and continues to have a hugely positive relative impact on possession. Honka's one of the more purely talented defencemen in his age group. Because of he's short (he's 5-foot-10) for the position and he plays a risk-taking style, Honka has always had to prove himself defensively and earn minutes his talent probably should have afforded him anyways. His play the last two seasons in Liiga, at 19 and 20, has done that in my opinion. Offensively, he's an impressive skater through his footwork (more than through his pushes I'd say), he's a superb outlet passer, his skill with the puck reminds of talented forwards on entries and one-on-one off of the point. He's an extremely creative east-west seam passer, and he makes pro-level skill plays that drive primary point totals and lead directly to goals. Defensively, he still needs to refine his positioning and decision-making but he has made real progress in both areas and he's sturdier than he looks. There's still a bit of a boom or bust element to his projection but he'll always have clear power-play utility and I think he's closer to where he needs to get (given his age) in the other areas than he gets credit for.

8. Patrik Puustola, LW/RW, 20 (JYP)

When Puustola is involved in the game, getting touches, and playing with good players, he's one of my favourite young players in the sport to watch and regularly flashes spectacular, ankle-breaking stickhandling ability and an NHL wrist shot that can clean beat goalies. He's crafty with the puck on his stick and he can play through contact because of a low base to his skating posture. Maybe most of all, though, he wants to be a difference-maker. He wants to attack off of the flank and make a big play. And he's talented enough to beat players one-on-one to create for himself or deke past a first layer and then use the attention that follows to feed a puck into space on the back side of the pressure to set up a teammate. I love the way he shapes his shots and changes angles through his release, too (he's as comfortable on the toe and backhand of his blade as he is at the centre of his forehand). But he might not have the speed or acceleration needed to get to the danger areas or beat defenders in that same way at the NHL level.

9. Joey Keane, RHD, 21 (Chicago Wolves)

Keane's got a look about him on the ice that really sets him apart out there. His posture makes him look stilted and stiff, he gets way out over his toes through his stride, and he holds his stick high on the shaft. But the reality of his game is much smoother than the look of it, with elite skating ability, a physical presence, excellent transition value (both ways), and an overall toughness and confidence about him. Last season, as a rookie in the AHL, all of those pieces, pieces which have always been there, really came together for him and elevated his projection. His skating helps him escape trouble, he plays an aggressive style, and he's a rightly with pro athleticism. Those things should make him a useful No. 4-6 D who gives a group of six some uncommon elements.

10. Dominik Bokk, RW/LW, 21 (Djurgårdens IF/Chicago Wolves)

Bokk's tough-to-evalaute because watching him is an experience in pulling your hair out. On one hand, he's got undeniable NHL skill with the puck on his stick inside the offensive zone, skill that has allowed him to completely dominate his peers and has occasionally really flashed at the pro level. On the other, he has now been through three SHL programs in three years and whenever he has been given an opportunity to play a scoring role it has been short-lived. And while I think coaches and perception have played a role in some of that in the same ways they have for Gunler, Honka and Puustola, I also think his undoing has been more on him than those other kids. He can frustrate the hell out of me. His natural skill is there in spades. He can break down coverage laterally with his hands. His wrist is threatening from mid-range (and sometimes from bad angles too). When he gets to the interior, he can make things happen. But there's also a real selfishness to his game that he's going to need to shake because he constantly tries to do too much and gets himself into trouble. If he's going to make it, the Canes are probably the right team to unpack him and put him back together. But the pieces just don't fit together right now.



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11. Morgan Geekie, C, 22 (Carolina Hurricanes/Chicago Wolves)

Geekie is a 6-foot-3 forward with well-rounded skill. Inside the offensive zone he plays off of his linemates well with enough talent in puck protection to delay and open up passing lanes, a hard wrist shot that pops from the slot, and good hands at the front of the net on tips, re-directs and dekes. His awkward skating stride could limit him as more of a complementary piece but he's detailed enough without the puck that he can be trusted in a variety of roles/usages and there is talent there.

12. Zion Nybeck, LW/RW, 18 (HV71)

Nybeck was quiet in a limited role at the world juniors but he hasn't looked out of place in the SHL and has points in three straight games in the SHL as I write this. His age-adjusted numbers in Sweden's top junior league are pretty remarkable, but questions about his size (5-foot-8, 181 pounds) and skating (the bigger issue, honestly) are real and he'll have to get a little faster to maximize his potential. Inside the offensive zone, Nybeck is evasive with the puck on his stick, sliding under and around defenders to play through layers and quickly finishing plays when he's left open. His ability to stutter and make defenders bite are high-end, and he manages his limitations well all told, but there's no question that he does have limitations. He's going to have to learn to play faster as he progresses up levels, and he's always going to struggle a little on board battles physically, but players his size need skill levels that are above and beyond and his qualifies. There's not more risk taking a player like him in the fourth round than there is taking the rest of the available players and their respective drawbacks.

13. Dom Fensore, LHD, 18 (Boston University)

There are four players in the NHL listed at 5-foot-7 or smaller. That number only doubles to eight at 5-foot-8 or smaller. And you have to go an inch further to find your first defenceman. So needless to say, if Fensore makes it he'll be alone as the smallest player (5-foot-7) at his position in the NHL. But all of the things you'd hope that he has if he's going to make it as the exception to the rule, he has. He's an A-level skater forward and backward, and an even better one going laterally because of his footwork. He's an excellent power-play quarterback because of his ability to maneuver against pressure, adjust his feet, change angles, and play through layers as a passer. And he's a brilliant exits/entries player who carves teams up in transition. Really the only part of his game on the offensive side of the puck that doesn't pop is his shot. Otherwise, it's all there. And because his feet are so smooth, he also has defensive value gapping up in transition to force dumps (and then pivoting to track back and collect them so that he can move play the other direction), or sliding into lanes to intercept passes and be disruptive when a player drops his head. If he's to succeed in the NHL eventually though, it'll be because of his ability to play in possession and spend more time on offence than defence. With the right partner, it might work.

Watch the way he works across the zone and opens up his feet here:

14. Vasilii Ponomaryov, C, 18 (Shawinigan Cataractes)

Ponomaryov was a highlight on a Russian roster with more lowlights at the world juniors. He just buzzes. That's the best way to describe him. He's always on the puck, he's got great hands, he can penalty kill effectively, he passes the puck well, and he opens up to make himself available. While he's not the biggest, strongest, fastest, or most talented kid, he understands how to play from A to B. He's also stronger than you might think at a cursory glance and uses his body positioning to come up with a lot of pucks. And then he also has skill, enough to deceive good defender, pick apart schemes with the puck, and makes plays off of all of the retrievals he wins. I'm a fan. He's going to take some time but he has some intriguing qualities, he's versatile, and he plays the same way regardless of how much he's playing or who he's playing with.

15. Alexander Pashin, LW/RW, 18 (Tolpar Ufa/Salavat Yulaev Ufa)

Pashin is a tiny (5-foot-7, 154 pounds) but hard-working winger who gets all over the ice to make things happen when he plays against his peers in the MHL but hasn't yet figured out how to work that game up levels in the

VHL and KHL (which is normal!). Pashin is extremely comfortable in high traffic because of his impressive dexterity, but he's also opportunistic and understands how to use time and space to delay into spots or support the play. And he works to correct against his small frame by keeping his feet moving. I see a kid with some intriguing qualities who had a late-July birthday in his draft class and could potentially look like a value pick with the proper time to marinate and develop into offensive roles at each next level before he makes the leap beyond. He has the agility, the skill, and the work ethic needed to succeed at his size.

16. Jesper Sellgren, LHD, 22 (Frölunda HC)

Sellgren's ranking here speaks to the depth Carolina has assembled within its pool. He has been a big all-situations defender for Frölunda this season, averaging more than 21 minutes a game to lead his new team in ice time. He's on the smaller side at 5-foot-10 but he's extremely mobile and plays a mature defensive game and a heady offensive one. He does a good job shading with his feet, he walks the line beautifully, he's got a good shot, and there's some deception to his game in the way he plays back against the grain, too, though I wouldn't say he's dynamic offensively. Sellgren projects pretty safely as a third-pairing NHLer with two-way value.

17. Pyotr Kochetkov, G, 21 (Vityaz Podolsk/Torpedo Nizhny Novgorod)

Despite a strong track record in the MHL (career .916 save percentage), VHL (career .925) and KHL (.915), Kochetkov is now with his fourth KHL team in his young career, having struggled to establish himself as a starter in the league. He's a little on the smaller side for a goalie at 6-foot-1, but he's quick on his feet (and knees), technically sound, and athletic, relying on sharp angles to control the first rebound and his movement to make recovery saves. Like the way he tracks the play but he's prone to letting mid-danger shots squeak through his body when he's set in his stance (a byproduct, in part, of his size). His biggest challenge at this point is one of reps, though. If he can't sort it out in the KHL and find a fit, it may be in his best interest to come to North America and work his way up through Carolina's system in the AHL.

18. Alexander Nikishin, RHD, 19 (Spartak Moskva)

Nikishin advanced up levels early because of his physical maturity (which presents itself in a hard shot, his ability to win board battles, and on net-front box outs) and he has now played nearly 50 KHL games as a teenager. He has held his own in limited minutes (a shade under 10 on average). The question with Nikishin is less about his ability to hold his own defensively, complement a more active partner, and penalty kill than it is about what his upside looks like beyond that. He moves the puck fine, he manages the point effectively against his peers, and he's a decent skater and a righty who is 6-foot-3. I like the way he reads the play, closes off the wall, and gets into passing lanes. His raw tools will keep him interesting, too.

19. Blake Murray, C, 19 (Surahammars IF/Sudbury Wolves)

Murray and two friends (Sudbury Wolves teammate Jack Thompson and 2021 NHL Draft over-ager Ethan Cardwell) signed in the third tier HockeyEtan at the start of January and have each looked good, making an immediate impact offensively at the low-level pro league. Murray has a pro frame and he's willing to use it to play a physical forechecking style, which was always going to help him make the jump to the pro level (he'll go back to the OHL if/when they return though). His skill level doesn't wow me but he plays to the inside, he's got a hard wrister in motion, and he has learned how to involve his linemates and play to his strengths.

20. Tuukka Tiekola, RW, 19 (Karpat)

When Tiekola plays against his age group, he's a ton of fun to watch and possesses a skill set that allows him to do virtually whatever he wants with the puck:

His comfort level in possession has always been extremely high. He can break defenders down inside the offensive zone. His hands in tight are superb, helping him quickly drag and adjust his stance on shots between the hashmarks (or quickly pull pucks laterally in tight on dekes). From a



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standstill, he's a quick skater, building separation through the neutral zone and cutting lightly through holes after he gains entry to make something happen. The big concern with his game is his light frame and weak strength on the puck. He's not so dynamic that pro levels will come easy without a little more muscle. All told he's a high-upside, low-floor prospect with some real flair on the puck.

The Tiers

Each of my prospect pool rankings will be broken down into team-specific tiers to give you a better sense of the talent proximity from one player to the next (a gap which is sometimes minute and in other cases quite pronounced).

The strength of the Hurricanes' pool is evident in their prospect tiers, with one big group spilling into another rather than dropping off in quick succession, in their two honourable mentions, who would both be ranked in the vast majority of systems, and in the overall skill level. There's a realistic outcome where this group of 22 players produces a handful of top-nine forward and a few D options. Short of having a top-10 pick or a star goalie prospect, it's as interesting a group as any in the league.

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1201898 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets place defenseman Zach Werenski on injured reserve, out 1-2 weeks

Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

Defenseman Zach Werenski, left, shown in training camp on Jan. 6, missed practice Saturday with a lower-body injury. He was placed on injured reserve and is out up to two weeks.

The Blue Jackets now have more than chemistry issues to worry about.

The search for their best regular lineup will continue Sunday at Nationwide Arena, when they face the Carolina Hurricanes in the opener of a home back-to-back, but defenseman Zach Werenski will not be part of the solution.

Werenski is expected to miss one-to-two weeks with a lower-body injury, which landed him on injured reserve retroactive to Thursday – when he sustained the injury late in the Blue Jackets' 4-3 victory against the Dallas Stars. Dean Kukan was promoted to Werenski's spot at left point on the first defense pairing in practice and will start the game Sunday in that role – partnering with Seth Jones.

"He sees the ice," Tortorella said of Kukan. "He's done a pretty good job. He's been one of our better defensemen, skating the puck out of our end zone and turning the net and just taking off. He's made some good offensive plays. Not afraid to make an offensive play."

Werenski has one goal, three assists and four points in 12 games. His production had fallen off during a slow start, after scoring a career-high 20 goals last season. Part of the reason is that Werenski, Jones and the second defense pairing – Vladislav Gavrikov and David Savard – have struggled with exits from the defensive zone.

The Blue Jackets' emphasis since Tortorella has coached the team is to attack straight ahead, starting with defensemen looking for vertical exit passes. Thus far, they've been forced to use a high number of "flipper" plays just to get the puck into the neutral zone.

"The flipper's a really important play, but we're relying on it way too much, where there are plays to be made and we're just not seeing them,"

he said. "And when we do see them, it's just not a sharp enough pass. 'Kuks' has been one of our better ones, as far as getting us out of our zone and making some offensive plays."

A trio who've yet to play this season alternated reps in Kukan's former spot.

Scott Harrington, Andrew Peeke and Gabriel Carlsson took turns skating with Michael Del Zotto, who'd previously gotten a look as Jones' partner in a 6-3 loss to Dallas on Tuesday.

Mixing and matching

Tortorella continues to reconfigure his forward lines, including a decision to move Max Domi from center to left wing on the second line in practice Saturday.

Alexandre Texier also moved from left wing to center on the first line and it appears that Mikhail Grigorenko is headed for his first healthy scratch Sunday against Carolina. Tortorella said Grigorenko will "probably" come out of the lineup to make room for rookie Liam Foudy's return from the taxi squad.

New guidelines

The NHL sent out additional measures this past week for teams to adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic. They took effect before games Thursday and include four changes to the league's already extensive list of protocols governing this season.

The changes include limiting players' time spent at the arena for practices and games, adding physical distancing in locker rooms, removing plastic shielding behind the benches to increase air flow during games played largely without fans and recommending use of high-quality HEPA air filtration systems near the benches.

The recommendations also included team meetings be held virtually rather than in person.

"The league's going to do whatever they feel is necessary to play the season and keep us safe," Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno said. "I don't really get too concerned about all these new protocols. We're lucky to play the game. And if you approach it that way, all that stuff doesn't really matter."

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1201899 Columbus Blue Jackets

Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic are already giving the Blue Jackets a boost after trade

Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

Blue Jackets forwards Patrik Laine, left, and Jack Roslovic share a moment on the bench in Thursday's win over Dallas. Both players scored their first goals for Columbus in the game.

Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic already are making an impact on the Blue Jackets' offense.

The former Winnipeg Jets teammates have a lot to learn about the systems their new coaching staff deploy, but there's no denying their talent with the puck. Each scored their first goals Thursday in a 4-3 victory over the Dallas Stars.



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Even better for Columbus, they and the team feel like they're just getting started after the blockbuster trade that sent Pierre-Luc Dubois to Winnipeg.

"The thing I like about Jack is he's not afraid to make a play and has made some good plays," Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella said. "With all the new guys in our lineup, we have some work to do as far as understanding (what to do) away from the puck and what's expected and how we play, that part of the game. But we knew that was going to happen."

Laine, a 22-year-old who was a prolific scorer in four seasons with the Jets, has instantly made the Jackets' top line more dangerous. And Roslovic, 23, is enjoying his homecoming to Columbus by getting a chance to produce as a center.

So far, so good.

Roslovic had a goal and assist on Thursday for his first multi-point game with the Blue Jackets, while Laine showed how tough he is to stop. After muscling his way past two Dallas players in the second period, he won possession and gave the Jackets a 3-1 lead with a backhand goal to the far side of the net.

"There's effort there," Tortorella said. "He's trying to do too much and I think that's just how he's made. I think that's why he's one of the best goal-scorers in the league; he wants to push the limits as far as what he's going to do."

Conditioning, however, is a different story and the need for improvement there applies to both players.

Roslovic was a restricted free agent until the trade, opting to train on his own in Columbus to start this season. Laine played just one game before an upper-body injury put him on injured reserve. His delay in returning to the ice was compounded by his having to a U.S. work visa and then a 48-hour quarantine once he arrived in Columbus.

That amounted to almost three weeks away from the ice before Laine made his Blue Jackets debut on Tuesday.

"Conditioning is something that, it's going to take a little time and we have very little practice time," Tortorella said. "I'm trying to give him as much ice as I can during the game to try to help him with that, but I don't think we're going to have a problem as far as his work habits."

Offensive contributions shouldn't be a concern either, for either one of the Jackets' new faces.

Cam Atkinson's goal in the third period Thursday was only his second of the season and his first game-winner. It was also his 200th career NHL tally, which made him the second player in franchise history to score that many.

Rick Nash (289) was the first to reach that plateau with the Blue Jackets and he remains the only player ahead of Atkinson on the franchise's all-time list.

"It's just one of those things where you may be overthinking it," Atkinson said of being stuck on 199 goals the previous four games. "It was like when I hit my 30th goal (in a season) or my 40th goal. It took a little bit to hit that, but once I did it, it seemed like the puck was following me more and I just kind of relaxed. Hopefully, this is all behind me now and I just take off and play the way I know I'm capable of playing."

Atkinson wasn't alone in reaching a "200" milestone. Seth Jones' assist on Oliver Bjorkstrand's goal 2:23 into the game was the 200th of his NHL career in 536 games. And captain Nick Foligno's next goal also will be his 200th in the NHL.

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1201900 Dallas Stars

Stars forward Joel Kiviranta (lower-body injury) to be a game-time decision vs. Chicago

By Matthew DeFranks

3:35 PM on Feb 6, 2021 CST

Stars coach Rick Bowness said forward Joel Kiviranta would be a game-time decision Sunday as he recovers from a lower-body injury that has kept him out for the last two weeks.

"It's not a guarantee he'll play," Bowness said. "We're hopeful, but again, it'll be a game-time decision."

Kiviranta said the injury occurred in the third period of the season-opening win over Nashville on Jan. 22, when "a little hit on the wall and twisted my leg a little bit." He tried to skate the following day at practice, but left the ice and hasn't played since.

Radulov missed practice Saturday morning, and Bowness said he was day-to-day with a lower-body injury.

The Stars recalled forwards Ty Dellandrea and Tanner Kero from the taxi squad, and sent Nick Caamano and Joel L'Esperance to the taxi squad. Dallas' active roster sits at 21 players, meaning the team has room to recall Bow and activate Kiviranta (if he plays) on Sunday without making another move. If Kiviranta does not play, the Stars can recall Jason Robertson from the taxi squad.

Matching mask: Oettinger debuted a new black and neon mask during Saturday's practice, presumably for use Sunday when the Stars once again wear their alternate Blackout uniforms.

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1201901 Dallas Stars

Anton Khudobin to be absent from game vs. Chicago as Stars handle 'internal issue'

By Matthew DeFranks

3:33 PM on Feb 6, 2021 CST

Anton Khudobin won't be in goal for the Stars on Sunday afternoon against Chicago. He won't be on the bench either.

Instead, Khudobin will be scratched as the team handles "an internal issue that we'll deal with internally," coach Rick Bowness said Saturday afternoon.

Khudobin was not on the ice during the main portion of practice that began at 11 a.m. Saturday but was on the ice as players began to depart at noon, when he took shots from players on the taxi squad.

Bowness said Jake Oettinger will start against the Blackhawks, and Landon Bow will serve as the backup. It will be Oettinger's third start of the season (2-0, .898 save percentage, 2.42 goals against average), and Bow's first game on the active roster. Bow has spent the first eight games of the season on the taxi squad.

When asked whether the issue with Khudobin would impact games beyond Sunday's against Chicago, Bowness said "We'll deal with one day at a time." The Stars and Blackhawks meet again at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.



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Khudobin last started Thursday night against the Blue Jackets during a 4-3 loss when he was uncharacteristically porous, making 18 saves in Columbus. After the game, Khudobin said "I don't know what happened, but it wasn't my night."

The game capped a road trip in which Khudobin started three of four games, going 0-2-1 with a .857 save percentage and 4.31 GAA. Beginning with Sunday's game against Chicago, the Stars' next eight games are at American Airlines Center, and Dallas doesn't play on the road again until Feb. 22 at Florida.

Bowness was asked Saturday broadly about how he handles player discipline and how he conveys his expectations to that player.

"Do it very openly," Bowness said. "We communicate very openly here. We're a family. We'll deal with things internally. You deal with things by communicating and making your feelings known, what is and what isn't acceptable.

"I have very few rules, but you damn well better follow them."

Khudobin's absence will be the first discipline-related scratch for the Stars since March 5, 2019, when Jim Montgomery scratched Alexander Radulov for being late to the morning skate. Radulov returned the next game with a hat trick against the Colorado Avalanche.

Khudobin entered this season as the undisputed No. 1 goaltender in Dallas, as Ben Bishop recovers from offseason knee surgery to repair a torn meniscus. It was the first time in Khudobin's career that he was the opening night starter and came on the heels of a run to the Stanley Cup Final in the Edmonton bubble.

Khudobin, 34, allowed three total goals in his first three starts (all wins) and 11 combined goals in his most recent three starts (two regulation losses and one shootout loss).

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.07.2021

1201902 Dallas Stars

Anton Khudobin to miss game for disciplinary reasons; what it means for Stars

By Saad Yousuf

Feb 6, 2021

Stars head coach Rick Bowness rarely speaks sternly. That's why his tone when discussing Anton Khudobin's absence from practice on Saturday stood out.

"I have very few rules but you damn well better follow them," Bowness said.

Bowness said Khudobin missed practice due to an "internal issue that we'll deal with internally." He did come out on the ice after the formal practice to get some work in. Bowness wouldn't expand on a timeline for Khudobin's absence, saying the team would take it one day at a time. Bowness did declare rookie goaltender Jake Oettinger as the starter for Sunday afternoon's game against the Chicago Blackhawks.

Though it isn't known what exactly transpired that led to the disciplinary action, the context of the situation is important to consider. Bowness is a players' coach and has the respect of the entire locker room. That respect doesn't simply fall back on the fact that no coach in the history of the sport has been behind the bench for more games. Bowness is one of the better communicators in the NHL and has a good rapport with not only the leadership group but the entire roster. He said that's how he's dealing with Khudobin's situation as well.

"We do it very openly. We communicate very openly here," Bowness said. "We're a family. We'll deal with things internally but you deal with things by communicating and making your feelings known, what is and what isn't acceptable."

Often times, coaches will use lesser player slipping up as an opportunity to send a message, because the ramifications on game day are minimal. That's not the case with Khudobin, who came into this season accounting for 100 percent of NHL starts between goaltenders on the Stars roster. He is the de facto No. 1 goaltender, at least until starter Ben Bishop's projected return in March.

On the hockey side of things, it's tough to assess the impact without knowing a timeline. If this is a short-term absence, the Stars can manage it by riding Oettinger. If it extends into any significant amount of time, things can get dicey very fast. Oettinger is expected to be the future of the franchise in the crease, but in the present, he's very much a prospect just developing under the NHL spotlight.

Before Khudobin re-signed with the Stars last offseason and Bishop was ruled out until March recovering from knee surgery, Oettinger was expected to be the starting goalie for the AHL affiliate Texas Stars. General manager Jim Nill had said Oettinger is knocking on the door of the NHL but still had some work to do. His role this season was to simply give Khudobin some breathers in an extraordinarily compressed NHL schedule, allowing the 34-year-old Russian goaltender to stay fresh while also allowing the 22-year-old rookie to play games for his development.

Through eight games this season, Oettinger has started two, going 2-0 and coming in for mop-up duty in one more during a lopsided loss. He's had good moments and bad, perhaps his best trait being not collapsing under adversity when he lets in a few untimely goals. The Stars have also helped Oettinger quite a bit, scoring seven goals in his first start and six goals in his second. Oettinger allowed three goals in each of those games. Oettinger's backup during Khudobin's disciplinary absence will be taxi squad goaltender Landon Bow. Bow has never started an NHL game but did play in relief a couple of times in the 2018-19 season. He played 30 games in the AHL last year with the Texas Stars, posting a 0.895 save percentage.

Again, there's no timeline for Khudobin's absence. In the past, there have been situations where the discipline was just a one-game absence and things moved on. Almost two years ago, forward Alexander Radulov was late for morning skate and then-head coach Jim Montgomery benched him for one game. Radulov scored a hat trick in his first game back. Along the lines of Radulov, for clarity purposes, he was also absent from practice on Saturday but Bowness dubbed that a lower-body injury and said Radulov was day-to-day, indicating it wasn't related to whatever transpired with Khudobin.

Goaltending is the backbone of the defense-first style of hockey the Stars play. Khudobin has been at the core of that for the past two seasons and is an important part of their present. For the Stars to continue succeeding this season, the hope would be that this just a bump in the road.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.07.2021

1201910 Florida Panthers

Panthers' Barkov always strives to shoot more. This season, he's actually doing it

JORDAN MCPHERSON

FEBRUARY 06, 2021 07:00 AM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 7, 2021

Aleksander Barkov has made the point apparent multiple times this season. This Florida Panthers team has a different vibe to it compared to the teams he played on the first seven years of his NHL career.

A mixture of new ownership, new players and newfound confidence has the Panthers humming early. Florida is 6-0-2 on the season heading into its Sunday afternoon matchup against the Detroit Red Wings at the BB&T Center, the third game of a six-game homestand. The Panthers are the only team in the NHL without a regulation loss.

"We've got a new team," Barkov said. "A fresh start."

But the way Barkov describes the team can also apply directly to himself. The Panthers are seeing an almost brand-new Barkov, an aggressive Barkov, the shoot-first Barkov to complement the otherworldly passing Barkov they have come to embrace as their captain.

"I think that's my mentality every year," the 25-year-old Barkov said. "Every training camp and every summer, I want to come into the season and shoot more and be more aggressive."

This year, he's actually doing it.

His 33 shots on goal? Most ever through the first eight games of a season. The next closest: 23 in the 2018-2019 season. Barkov already has four games with at least five shots on goal. He had eight games with those marks over 66 games last season and just 49 in his 478-game career heading into this season.

His four goals and 11 points? Yup. Also career-best marks eight games into a season. His seven assists only trail the eight he recorded in the opening of that 2018-2019 season.

Recording at least one point in seven of the first eight games of the season? You guessed it. He never did that in his career before this year, either.

Barkov, always one to defer credit, points to his new linemates, Carter Verhaeghe to his left and Anthony Duclair to his right, for a lot of his success.

"When you have the chance to shoot," Barkov said, "you don't pass up that opportunity. As a line, we've been putting a lot of pucks to the net and creating chances from that."

And that group has been successful. Verhaeghe and Barkov have combined to score 10 of the team's 28 goals — 35.7 percent. Barkov has the primary assist on three of Verhaeghe's six goals. Verhaeghe has the primary assist on two of Barkov's four goals.

"So easy to play with," Verhaeghe said. "We click pretty well."

With three capable scorers — Duclair scored 23 goals a season ago and has six assists already this year — Panthers coach Joel Quenneville likes his chances when the trio of Verhaeghe, Barkov and Duclair is on the ice.

"I don't care who shoots on that line, and I don't think they have to make the perfect play," Quenneville said. "They are creating odd-man situations with their speed, taking it to the net. ... Barky, whether he passes it shoots it, that whole line sees plays and make plays. They expect the puck at all times. The quality they have been getting has been very noticeable."

And just because Barkov is taking the initiative and attacking the net more doesn't mean he isn't a magician when it comes to passing. He gave a clear reminder of that in the second period of Thursday's 5-4 overtime loss when he slid the puck through Nashville defenseman Matt Benning's legs before passing to Aaron Ekblad for a power play goal.

But honing in on both aspects of the game, as the Panthers have wanted him to for his entire career will only make him more lethal on the offensive end.

He's embracing it.

"I'm looking forward," Barkov said, "to shooting more."

Miami Herald LOADED: 02.07.2021

1202015 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' loss to Flames shines searing spotlight on cost of goaltending woes

Mark Spector

February 7, 2021, 2:13 AM

EDMONTON — There was a time when the Edmonton Oilers had a goalie who could let in five, but would never surrender that all-important sixth goal. More often than not those old Oilers teams would win the game 6-5 — or 8-5 — and nobody cared what Grant Fuhr's goals against average was.

The only stat that mattered was how many wins Fuhr had — because he always gave his team a chance to win.

Well, that was then.

Today, if the opponent gets to three you're likely to lose. So Mikko Koskinen's 3.55 goals against average is a problem.

A major problem.

Today, the Oilers have a goalie who simply doesn't give them enough save on enough nights, as was evident again Saturday night in Calgary. Edmonton scored four but lost 6-4 to a Flames team that played well, but had too easy a time getting the puck past Koskinen.

And Jacob Markstrom was simply better.

"They have a really good goaltender. He had a solid night," agreed defenceman Adam Larsson, who would defend his goalie if questioned.

The closest the coach came to admitting that the goaltending is killing his team was this: "It's a combination," said Dave Tippett. "You've got to play better in front of your goalie and the goalie has to make more saves."

Of course the team has to play well defensively. Goes without saying.

But somehow, in Game 12 Saturday the Oilers allowed two goals against inside a two minute span, for the eighth time this season.

That tells me that the goalie can't give them a save when they need it. Can't stop the bleeding.

Tippett calls out Oilers' defence & goaltending after loss

When Jesse Puljujarvi scores to make it 3-3 early in the third period, Koskinen responds by having Dillon Dube's power-play shot — from a predictable opposition — squeeze right through him and into the net, just a minute-and-half later. It's deflating, and if you think the Oilers bench isn't sagging every time Koskinen lets in his fourth of the night — or the first shot of the game, as he did Saturday — you're kidding yourself.

They're all pros. They know good goaltending from bad.

The 38-year-old Mike Smith returns to the lineup on Sunday, though he hasn't had a save percentage of over .902 in two seasons. He'll start one of the games in Ottawa — either Monday or Tuesday — but in the meantime, Edmonton watched a three-game winning streak get snapped on a night when they scored four, but simply couldn't outscore the quality of netminding they received.

They've got a decent team in Edmonton, but the most important position in hockey has been woefully neglected. You don't win when your goalie's



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save percentage starts with an eight, or when the penalty kill is near last in the league because it can't get a save.

"We're looking for some better play in front of the goalie, and the goalie could stop a couple more," Tippett said.

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

Koskinen gets credit for playing as many minutes as he has, but the painful truth is, the Oilers have the second best goalie on the ice most nights. Sometimes they overcome it, sometimes they don't – like on Saturday, when it took seven goals to win the game.

It's really on management, on GM Ken Holland, that they went to war this season with a tandem of Koskinen and Smith, who hasn't played a minute yet. The big Finn lugged an .897 save percentage into the game, then allowed six goals on 28 shots — a .786 save percentage.

He's at .889 this morning. You don't make the playoffs when your starter is sub .915 — a number that seems out of this stratosphere for Koskinen's leaky game.

Of course, the penalty kill can't get through enough powerplays — because they can't get a save either. That unit ranked 25th in the NHL prior to the game, then went one-for-three Saturday.

Whether you're facing Markstrom in Calgary, Carey Price in Montreal, Frederik Andersen in Toronto, or Connor Hellebuyck in Winnipeg — almost every night in the North Division the Oilers go into the game knowing their goalie isn't as good as the guy at the other end. That's not an opinion — it's a fact.

You can find as many excuses as you want. The Oilers are going nowhere with this level of goaltending.

It isn't good enough. Not even close.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.07.2021

1202016 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Disconnected Canucks fail to find defiant spark in latest Maple Leafs loss

Iain MacIntyre

February 7, 2021, 12:57 AM

In the last eight years with the Washington Capitals, Braden Holtby's team never came close to a losing season and won more games than anyone in the National Hockey League.

Since 2014, Holtby had not experienced a regulation-time losing streak longer than the one the Vancouver Canucks have dug for themselves in the span of six days: getting embarrassed over four games in Montreal and Toronto by a combined score of 23-9. Saturday's dismemberment by the Toronto Maple Leafs was 5-1.

This futility stuff is new to Holtby. To be fair, his .888 save percentage is also new to the Canucks, although goaltending is far down the team's list of problems at the moment.

It's understandable if Holtby is little shocked by what he is seeing. But aren't we all?

In the third period of Saturday's loss, after a phantom check or effort — there appeared to be neither — by J.T. Miller allowed Auston Matthews to collect the puck uncontested from Holtby's clearance and score uncontested, Hockey Night in Canada caught the goaltender giving Miller a piece of his mind.

We're not sure, but the abbreviation of his sentence may have been WTF?

Again, everyone on the West Coast can relate.

What's clear is even the Canucks know how awful they're playing. When cameras panned along the Vancouver bench late in the third period, players looked more like a funeral reception receiving line than a hockey team.

"What was said the ice stays on the ice," Holtby told reporters after the game, confirming that something was said. "I think it's not just that play, a lot of things it's just trying to get on the same page.

"It's hard to take losses like this. They're piling up on us. That's frustrating. The only way to get out of it is to get back to work. . . and find a way to get on the same page. We're a disconnected group right now. It's showing. We need to find a way to fight through that."

They also need to find some energy despite falling off a cliff before the last of their 16-games-in-27 days start to the compressed schedule.

Holtby admits Canucks veterans must step up and respond to end skid

Their response on Saturday to being hammered 7-3 by the Leafs on Thursday was to fall behind 1-0 on Wayne Simmonds' power-play goal at 4:42 and generally get outplayed again at the start. There was no spark in the Canucks, no defiance. They just lost badly again.

"That's tough, something I've never been through in my career, so it's very frustrating," Holtby said. "I think as individuals, especially guys with more experience, when you have a bad game, you've got to come out flying. You've got to be ready to play, right from the start.

"You never know if you're going to win or lose, but you need a response, and we don't have that yet. That's on myself, the other older guys that have been around and know, that have been on good teams, after you have an embarrassing loss, that next game, the next game is important."

Canucks coach Travis Green, who brought long, lost Loui Erikson back into his lineup to try to make the forward lines more balanced and responsible defensively, had no problem with Holtby holding Miller responsible.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with guys trying to make other players accountable," he said. "That's part of leadership. When you're going through frustrating times, that happens once in a while. I've been on lots of teams where you can fight, you can get in arguments. . . but they're all in it for the same thing. I don't think there's anything wrong with that once in a while."

The disconnect between players was as obvious on the ice and as it was in post-game messaging from the Canucks.

"The way it looks right now is everything looks difficult for our team," Green explained. "Simple plays look hard right now. Simple passes look hard, simple shots on net, it's not coming easy. Maybe that is a little bit of a mental thing. When you're winning, everything seems to just flow and it seems easier. In your mind, it seems easier, which obviously frees up your body. Right now, things look difficult for our team."

Brock Boeser scored the Canucks' only goal, in garbage time with the score 5-0. But he and linemates Elias Pettersson and Miller, reunited by Green, had one extended shift of sustained offensive pressure at five-on-five. Miller did not register a shot. Pettersson had one.

Overmatched rookie defenceman Jalen Chatfield was minus-four. Another rookie, winger Nils Hoglander, was the best Canuck.

Vancouver gets the pleasure of playing the formidable Leafs again on Monday.

While general manager Jim Benning works the phones to find a trade, as fans in Vancouver howl on social media for change, Canuck captain Bo Horvat said he believes in his team.



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"We have a lot of guys that have played some pretty important hockey and they've gone a long way in the playoffs and have been on great teams," he said. "We have a lot of character in our room, a lot of guys that want to win hockey games. We've just got to find it within ourselves to get better and to come out of this."

Soon. Very soon.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.07.2021

1202017 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Backlund spearheads Flames' most emotional win of season

Flames top Oilers in season's first Battle of Alberta

It was a barn burner, and the Flames got the 6-4 win over the Oilers in the season's first Battle of Alberta.

Eric Francis

February 7, 2021, 2:42 AM

CALGARY – In Saturday's warmup all the talk around Calgary was about Bennett and Blasty, as in Sam and the retro uniforms.

After being dominated by the Edmonton Oilers in the first period, the talk turned to the Flames burying themselves early, as they have done so often this year.

By night's end the focus was on Backlund and the bounce back, as in Mikael and the way he may have helped turn the Flames' season on a dime.

Backlund shines against Oilers offensively and defensively

Following an opening period in which the Oilers led 2-1 and outshot the Flames 17-3, it was Backlund's newly-formed trio that spearheaded the team's most emotional win of the season.

Not only did he work with Andrew Mangiapane and Milan Lucic to limit Connor McDavid (to two points) at one end of the ice, Backlund's line combined for seven points to cap an 80s style shootout with a 6-4 win.

"I thought that line tonight was huge for us," said coach Geoff Ward, who finally got some of the secondary scoring his team was supposed to be all about.

"Mikael is one of those players who plays such an important role for us. It's funny the way the flows go in the game. You can look dead in the water and you're not playing well and something weird happens and all of a sudden you run the other way. Hopefully it springboards us in that direction. Time will tell. We certainly have something to build on."

Lucic's goal early in the second calmed a team that certainly looked on the brink of losing its sixth game in eight outings.

Backlund's strike two minutes later officially turned the tide in a game the Flames dominated from the second period on.

Lucic commends Flames' resilient effort after rough first period

Despite Matthew Tkachuk's efforts, there weren't any fireworks outside of the flames emanating from the rafters as the team outscored the Oilers 3-1 after Jesse Puljujarvi tied it in the first minute of the third.

"We talked about having more swagger when we're down," said Backlund, who finished with a goal and two assists while also spending the final two minutes of the game on the ice.

"We don't want to get down in games but we have lately. We've got to get that swagger back that we know we are going to come back and we know we are a good team and it doesn't matter how games go. I thought that was a big thing for us coming out in the second with a lot more energy and a lot more confidence and swagger to our game. We were playing more in the O-zone and having more of the puck. I thought it was a big step for us for sure."

Coming into the first of 10 provincial showdowns on a two-game losing skid, the Flames spoke endlessly about how a game with this much hype and emotion was bound to serve them well.

They were right.

Inserting Zac Rinaldo and Byron Froese into the lineup to add energy, Ward also saw fit to bring Bennett back into the fold after being a healthy scratch following his trade request. Playing alongside Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan, he converted a brilliant backhand pass from behind the net from Gaudreau to slam home his first goal of the season with nine minutes remaining.

It was the insurance marker in a game very much in doubt until that point.

"It's great for my personal confidence, but more importantly it's a win for the team — it's a solid effort from the whole team that excited me the most," said Bennett, whose status was kept a secret until warmup.

"We felt like he would give us some energy," Ward said of the move.

"We need to have more energy as a team and he's familiar with the Battle of Alberta. He understands the rivalry. He came in and, what can you say, multi-point games for Monny and Johnny and Sam gets the sixth goal — a big goal for us. All in all, a big night."

Bennett breaks down how it felt to score against Oilers

Gaudreau's goal was the prettiest of the evening, putting the hosts up 5-3 by rifling his seventh of the year top shelf on a play that started with his nice defensive effort at the other end.

There were so many significant contributions from Flames players that Elias Lindholm's goal in the opening minute, not to mention his defensive work against the Oilers' two big lines, were glossed over by many.

"Obviously you can't say enough about Marky — he kept us in the game in the first period or it might have been a three- or four-goal lead for them," said Ward of Jacob Markstrom, whose game-saving prowess has already become ho-hum around these parts.

"Again, I thought Backlund's line really got us going in the second and the other guys picked up some energy off it and we were able to get our game going."

Tkachuk found himself scuffling often with Puljujarvi of all people, eventually prompting the young Finn to take a slashing penalty, which led to Dillon Dube's go-ahead power-play goal three minutes into the third.

"Perfect timing for this kind of game," said Lucic of a tilt that involved very few of the post-whistle scrums and exchanges many expected following their highly combustible battle last season.

"Everyone had an impact on the game and everyone stepped up when they needed to."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.07.2021

1202018 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Auston Matthews, Maple Leafs killing Canucks' confidence

Luke Fox

February 7, 2021, 1:02 AM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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TORONTO – Perhaps even more than boosting their own stock during back-to-back routs, the Toronto Maple Leafs are crashing the Vancouver Canucks.

Prior to arriving in the East this week, land of the 4 p.m. PT start, the Canucks were riding a four-game win streak. That spike of good fortune now feels like GameStop mirage, abruptly pounded down to earth, first by Tyler Toffoli's Canadiens and now even more fiercely by a rested Maple Leafs squad that has learned to hammer the gas.

In thumping Vancouver 5-1 Saturday night and jacking the two-game aggregate score to 12-4, the Leafs (9-2-1) reclaimed top spot in the NHL, padded up a bevy of individual stat lines, and rebooted the #FireBenning hashtag into trending status.

"We haven't probably played a team that's as fast and skilled as Toronto," said Vancouver coach Travis Green, now tasked with injecting life into a leaky group that has showed no push-back in this city. "They are a fast, very skilled team, and you've got to have your skating legs to play against that team."

Saturday, Green tried reuniting the Lotto Line. He switched goalies. He even gave Loui Eriksson his first taste of action since August, back when the Canucks looked like the best squad our country had to offer.

Nothing sparked.

Blink and a four-game win streak gave way to a four-game losing skid.

Green knows everything looks difficult for Canucks during skid

The Canucks waited nine minutes to even register a shot on net, and the Leafs dominated from puck drop to buzzer, generating 15 high-danger scoring chances at even-strength to Vancouver's five.

Sheldon Keefe has challenged his players to widen the standings gap and pitted his two Manny Malhotra-guided power-play units in a friendly internal contest to see who could light the lamp more often.

By the time Toronto had scored another power-play goal (its 15th in 12 games), and Mitch Marner had another three assists (already his seventh multi-point outing in 2021) and Auston Matthews had extended his goal streak to seven games and running, Chris Johnston was talking about the trade potential of healthy scratch Jake Virtanen during Hockey Night in Canada's intermission.

As Canucks look for spark, fresh start for Virtanen a possibility

When the 2020 version of the Maple Leafs lost to the Columbus Blue Jackets in the post-season bubble, Matthews lamented the roster's lack of a "killer instinct."

Somewhere between signing Wayne Simmonds and Keefe & Co. drilling home a fresh mandate for urgency, that instinct is being developed.

Toronto is now 5-0-0 when leading after one period. The Leafs have yet to lose a one-goal game in regulation. They're breaking out of their own zone with purpose and attacking the net-front with confidence.

Over the past 72 hours, Canucks defenders have been getting walked more often than the pet dog in a pandemic.

Killer instinct? Toronto is sucking the soul out of Vancouver, to the point where we're not sure how much credit the Leafs really deserve here because, right now, the Canucks seem incapable of summoning a measuring-stick effort.

Marner & Matthews share huge impact Simmonds has had on Maple Leafs

"We're a disconnected group right now, and it's showing," admitted Holby, post-loss.

Conceded Green: "I don't think we're a team that's built to chase teams from behind."

Added Brock Boeser: "We know the way we have been playing is unacceptable. We all need to work together and communicate."

Unlike Vancouver, Toronto is being led by its best (and, yes, highest-paid) players.

Each member of the Core Four — Matthews, Marner, William Nylander and John Tavares — is humming along at a point-per-game pace or better in the goal-happy North.

Matthews, in particular, has juiced up his wow factor, with consecutive two-goal efforts during which his coach believes he could've scored four or five.

"He's really hungry," says Frederik Andersen. "He demands the puck, and he shoots with purpose every time. He has so many different kinds of shots that it's really tough to prepare or scout him. He picks his spots and has really good vision."

Keefe says his top centre still has the power to surprise the bench.

"That just speaks to his ability and how special he is. That goal tonight, it happened so fast that I don't think anybody on the ice was really ready for it. Just with how quickly he went around a defender [Jalen Chatfield] to put it in the net, it was impressive," Keefe said. "All season I really think he's been very good for us, but these last two games he's really had jump."

Matthews dekes around Chatfield before sniping puck past Holby

If anything, Keefe wonders, he may have disrupted Matthews' flow against Vancouver by rolling all four lines and keeping his 10-goal man on the bench for some O-zone starts. A luxury only long leads can provide.

"He was really feeling it. That's really good for us," Keefe said, "and good for him that he's having that confidence. He was doing it in all zones for us to start the season, and now he's starting to get the consistent rewards around the net."

Great for the stat line. And horrible for the Canucks, who still have 60 more minutes of this to endure before they can fly out of town.

Puck drop on Black Monday is scheduled for 4 p.m. PT.

NOTE: Simmonds, who scored twice in Saturday's victory, was struck by a puck in the third period. The winger left the game after getting attention on his hand by a trainer and needed further evaluation. An update on Simmonds' condition is expected Monday, when the Leafs return to practice.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 02.07.2021

1202019 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames legend Iginla takes youth coaching job, faces dilemma at home

Eric Francis

February 6, 2021, 1:05 PM

Born in Edmonton but coronated in Calgary, Jarome Iginla insists his allegiance to the Flames will never change.

However, as the first of 10 instalments of the Battle of Alberta is about to face off, the Flames legend admits he's on the horns of a dilemma.

"My boys are big fans of both teams," chuckled the retired Flames legend from his home in Boston.

"I'm not happy they're Oilers fans, but I can't impose my will on them."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Funny, as he imposed his will on opponents more effectively than almost any player of his era, over his storied 21-year career.

Clearly they've lived in the United States for too long, as everybody knows you have to pick sides in Alberta's interprovincial punch-up.

"I know — growing up, when you are living it, you are one or the other," said Iginla, who eclipsed the 500-goal and 1,000-point mark during his 16-year stint as the Flames' longtime captain.

"They haven't lived through it. In Edmonton they like Connor McDavid and Tyson Barrie who they got to see in Colorado (with their dad). With the Flames there's a long history there and they've got their (Sean) Monahan and (Johnny) Gaudreau pictures, and Looch (Milan Lucic) has sent them stuff.

"I'll have to ask which one they are cheering for. I'm not sure they'll be honest with me."

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

Perhaps the two youngsters will better comprehend the hatred between the two fan bases this summer when the family moves back to Kelowna where dad has a job waiting for him.

On Friday Iginla was announced as head coach of the U15 Prep team at RINK Hockey Academy Kelowna, where his family's longtime summer home is just 15 minutes away.

It is there he will coach Joe, 12, while helping out former Flames teammate Byron Ritchie with the U18 team 14-year-old Tij hopes to play on.

"I guess it's my first post-hockey job, but it doesn't feel like a job," laughed Iginla, who retired from his Hall of Fame career in 2017 following hip surgery.

"I've enjoyed coaching kids the last four years. I like the competitive side of it. I love the grassroots side of hockey and all that it offers kids, but my passion lies more with kids that truly want to get better and excel and enjoy competing. That's where my fit is best."

As a volunteer co-coach with the Boston Jr. Eagles, the 43-year-old Iginla recently helped Tij's 2006 team progress from a ranking of 20th to tops in the nation. Not too shabby.

The Iginlas set up shop in Boston expressly because of its highly-regarded minor hockey program, in which all three of his kids have excelled.

"Both boys are forwards and both like scoring goals and offence," said Iginla, one of the game's last great power forwards, who finished with 625 goals, good for 16th all time.

"The boys are serious about hockey and it gives them a chance to excel with their programs. I would have loved to have been a part of a prep program like this when I was growing up."

Their passion for the game meshed brilliantly with the offer made by the Winnipeg-based company that bought Kelowna's Program of Excellence and is giving it a facelift with a new facility and the high-profile hiring of Iginla and skills coach Glenn Carnegie.

"We miss Canada and family and friends, and home is back west," said Iginla.

"We always planned to move back west but we were going to wait until my daughter (16-year-old Jade) was done grade 12. She's in grade 11 and she went to play at Shattuck in Minnesota this year and she's loving it. The time was right for us to come home."

Iginla said he's somehow gravitated to the defensive side of the game as a coach.

"Funny, when I coach I do a lot of work with the defencemen," said Iginla.

"I get drawn to working with them and helping them be part of the offence and making plays and moving the puck."

He said he has yet to make calls to some of his former coaches like Darryl Sutter or Mike Keenan to ask for tips, but he often finds himself thinking of their techniques along the way.

"I can see why a lot of ex-players get into coaching," he said.

"I think of Rico (former Calgary assistant coach Rich Preston) and Darryl and how much fun they had. I see where they are coming from. I've definitely used some of their one liners, and a few from Keenan too. Coaching these kids is not that much different. The speed is, yes, but some days they're flat and not into it and they jump out of the way of the puck and you're like, 'Are you kidding me, you're a d-man — you're supposed to eat pucks!'"

Iginla said that while he watches NHL highlights with the kids nightly, he doesn't miss playing anymore.

"I'm in a good place because I wouldn't rather be doing it — I'd really rather be home with the kids and watching their sports and I know playing would be at the cost of that," said Iginla, who will be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in the fall.

"It looks so fun to be out there though. It makes me appreciate it's a fun, neat job. There are stresses that go with it day-to-day, and you're always being in the now and 'what have you done lately?' But you've got 20 personalities and endless jokes in the room, and I've enjoyed helping with teenagers and seeing them go through it."

If only he could set them straight on which team to cheer for.

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Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Could a Maple Leafs trade for Sam Bennett make sense?

Luke Fox

February 6, 2021, 8:00 AM

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. Just a few thoughts from a Rinkside Karen.

1. The Toronto Maple Leafs are in the trade market for a forward.

The Calgary Flames have a forward who wants a change of scenery.

So, fans are wondering, is there a match? Is there a path to lure GTA native Sam Bennett back to his home province?

Well, it's complicated.

From the point of view of Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas, who has reportedly expressed some level of interest, Bennett fits the profile of an attractive target: Local guy. Top-five pick with something to prove. Significantly elevates performance in the post-season (from 0.35 to 0.63 points per game). Hard to play against. No cross-border quarantine. Not a pure rental (Bennett will turn RFA in the off-season). Versatile enough to be tried at left wing alongside John Tavares and William Nylander or centre a checking third line.

Despite Bennett's sluggish start — one assist, minus-5 rating, healthy scratch — there's intriguing upside here.

There is more than one hurdle to overcome, however.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Toronto is tight to the cap, and Bennett carries a \$2.55-million hit. That's significant when you consider all the bargain depth Leafs — Travis Boyd, Wayne Simmonds, Jimmy Vesey, Nic Petan, Adam Brooks, Jason Spezza — already outproducing Bennett.

While Dubas has shown a willingness to trade the future (i.e., first-round picks) to help the present, Calgary GM Brad Treliving must also win now.

Treliving would prefer a roster player in return, which explains Larry Brooks' report that he's doing some due diligence on the Rangers' Tony DeAngelo. And we'd have to assume Treliving will be wary of dealing Bennett within the division, lest he come back to bite the Flames (see: Tyler Toffoli versus Vancouver).

Travis Dermott's name has been thrown out there, but I don't like that move from Toronto's perspective. The Leafs still aren't comfortable with Mikko Lehtonen in the six spot. And with blue line injuries inevitable, there is no need to subtract from what appears to be the deepest Leafs defence corps in years.

(Stray thought: Would Treliving take a chance on Pierre Engvall?)

Bottom line: If Treliving keeps his asking price for Bennett high, Dubas might be better off accruing cap space and waiting to spend a draft pick or prospect in the rental market, which won't heat up until late March.

2. "Youth will be served on this team, for sure," Doug Armstrong announced upon being named GM of Canada's 2022 Olympic team. "This group we are going to assemble is probably going to have a lot of faces that have never worn the Canadian jersey at this level of competition."

Let the debates over who should don the red and white in Beijing begin. Snub SZN is nearing for what will be the most scrutinized hockey roster in eight years.

"I'd like to welcome aboard and thank all of our special advisors — the 37 million Canadians out there that will have an input on this team," Armstrong said Wednesday. "I can't guarantee victory, but I can guarantee this group will work tirelessly to put a team on the ice you can be proud of."

Like past Team Canada architects, Armstrong has vowed to build a complete team with penalty killers and shutdown players, not simply an all-star squad. He will load up on natural centres and push extra pivots to the wings.

Here is this advisor's working roster for Team Canada 2022, starting with the Fastest Line on Earth:

Mathew Barzal – Connor McDavid – Nathan MacKinnon

Brad Marchand – Sidney Crosby – Patrice Bergeron

Jonathan Huberdeau – Ryan O'Reilly – Mark Stone

Sean Couturier – Brayden Point – Mitch Marner

Extras: Steven Stamkos, Mark Scheifele

Shea Theodore – Alex Pietrangolo

Morgan Rielly – Cale Makar

Thomas Chabot – Shea Weber

Extras: Dougie Hamilton, Bowen Byram

Carey Price

Darcy Kuemper

Extra: Mackenzie Blackwood

"You want to have a good mix" of veterans, emerging stars and players in their prime, assistant GM Roberto Luongo said. "When I was involved, it was three different scenarios all three years there."

3. As the Leafs continue tinkering in lab, trying to discover their optimal line combinations, it's worth pointing out the club is drawing nearer to a contractual benchmark for centre/winger Engvall.

The forward can only play three more games until he loses his waiver-exemption status.

As coach Sheldon Keefe juggles his bottom six, essentially extending tryouts into February — we see you, Nic Petan — and Joe Thornton and Nick Robertson keep hitting the ice for rehab, Engvall's status is something to tuck into the back of your mind.

In this season of depth, a competing general manager might take a flier on a versatile 24-year-old like Engvall, who will remain under club control after his (\$1.25 million AAV) contract expires in 2022.

"His speed, the way he gets on the puck, both offensively and defensively, really helps us," Keefe says. "It seems like he never gets tired. He can skate from the offensive zone back to our end as good as anybody we have."

That said, Toronto's coaching staff has urged Engvall to better use of his six-foot-five, 214-pound frame. To use his strength and get more engaged physically. Keefe would also like to find more penalty-killing time for Engvall and have him improve at faceoffs.

"A lot of these things are really new to him, for a guy that was primarily an offensive player his whole life up until coming into pro hockey here in North America and trying to find his way," Keefe says. "We'd like to see some improvement there, but by and large I think he's done a good job with the opportunity that he's got."

4. Quote of the Week goes to Duncan Keith, explaining to reporters his recent explosion in shot attempts: "Getting the Corsi up so you guys think I'm good."

5. Make hay with the man-advantage while you can.

NHL penalty calls are up significantly through the first 25 days of the season, with clubs averaging 3.59 power plays per game. A noticeable uptick from 2.97 in 2019-20, that's the highest rate in 11 years. (Perhaps more notable: The power-play success rate — 21.3 per cent — is at its highest since 1985-86!)

Why?

Well, normally the league plays about 100 pre-season games in which players and officials can work out the kinks and get a feel for the line between fair and foul. This season we had none.

Also, some players haven't played a game in 10 months. Some officials haven't called a game in 10 months either, but they've been on Zoom calls familiarizing themselves with the rulebook.

Despite what some believe, sources say the league has not mandated any changes to the standard this season, the way it did with slashing in 2017. So, we'd expect the frequency of power plays to decrease as time goes on.

All the more reason for your favourite team to get its 5-on-5 game in order.

6. Leafs fans: Remember the name Veeti Miittinen.

The club drafted several smallish European talents in the 2020 draft, but the early returns on this sixth-rounder (168th overall) are particularly encouraging.

The 19-year-old St. Cloud State star's transition from Finland to the North American game has been virtually seamless.

This week, Miittinen was crowned National Collegiate Hockey Conference Rookie of the Month for January — and nominated for the Hobey Baker Award, alongside elite prospects like Spencer Knight, Owen Power and Cam York.



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Miettinen is a left shot who plays the right wing. He's known for his quick-burst skating and is a power-play beast (NCHC-leading five PP goals) who boasts a lethal wrist off the half-wall.

His 9-9-18 stat line over 17 games leads all rookies in scoring.

Miettinen has yet to sign his entry-level contract with Toronto.

7. Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic have already scored their first goals for Columbus while Pierre-Luc Dubois is still quarantining, two weeks after the blockbuster trade.

Surely this will give North Division teams pause when trying to make trades south of the border.

As for Laine, it's great to know that his trademark deadpan cleared customs and immigration.

"I'm pretty known for my backhand, so I might as well try to use it," Laine said, swallowing a smile, when describing his first goal with his new team.

Jackets fans can enjoy the honeymoon for — what? — a couple weeks before they'll need to start sweating Laine's next contract.

He's a restricted free agent with arbitration rights this summer and should become the highest-paid player on the roster.

This is a critical negotiation for countryman Jarmo Kekalainen, who's out here buying Finnish billboards.

The GM cannot allow the fleeing of high-end talent to continue, but a long-term deal for Laine will affect the internal cap for the rest of the core.

Budding star Alexandre Texier is also RFA in 2021. New contracts for Seth Jones (UFA), Zach Werenski (RFA), Max Domi (RFA), Roslovic (RFA), Joonas Korpi (UFA) and Elvis Merzlikins (RFA) will all be needed in 2022.

Welcome to Columbus, Patrik!

Or as they say in Finland: pic.twitter.com/SwD6kyfIL7

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) January 29, 2021

P.S. Loved Nick Foligno citing of Michael Del Zotto's experience to show how much coach John Tortorella has changed since New York:

8. That Minnesota Wild's top pick, Marco Rossi, returned to his native Austria due to a serious case of COVID-19 is one of the most alarming stories of the season.

I spoke to Rossi heading into the 2020 draft and was blown away by his dedication to health and fitness throughout the pandemic.

When this kid vows to "come back stronger than ever," as he did this week, we believe him.

"Like many, I was originally shocked and very disappointed, yet at this time I am very optimistic that my health is and will be good to return to train/play. One thing I know is that I come back stronger than ever!!"

— Marco Rossi (@marcorossi2383) February 1, 2021

I asked Rossi if he views himself as a pure centreman, or if he'd be comfortable starting out his NHL career on the wing.

Rossi responded by going back to age four, when his father stressed the need to keep your head up, to always think pass.

"The problem with younger kids, like four or five years old, their parents are always saying, 'If you score, you're gonna go to the restaurant.' My dad tried to not be like that. My dad was even happier if I did an assist or find open guys and be a good teammate on the ice," Rossi explained.

"And then every time I went to a team, they were like, 'You're gonna play centre because you always have your head up and give passes. You're not selfish.' So I've always played centre since I'm small.

"The last time I've played on a wing was like when I was 15, playing pro hockey in Switzerland — my first game there. I played maybe two shifts on a wing, and then it would be right back to centre. It was funny.

"So, I don't care what position. I just want to play in the NHL. That's my goal."

9. Toronto's Jason Spezza went on a ridiculous run in January where he won 16 consecutive faceoffs over a two-game span.

It got me thinking: What's the record for most faceoffs won in a row?

With all the time saved by morning commute from my bed to my couch, I decided to investigate. The NHL doesn't track such nerdy minutia too far back in history, but here's what I found out (with help from @SNStats mastermind Steve Fellin).

Best known faceoff performance in a single game: Curtis Brown of the Buffalo Sabres went 19-for-19 on Oct. 4, 2001 vs. the Atlanta Thrashers.

Best known faceoff streak over multiple games: The master, Patrice Bergeron, went an insane 25-for-25 from April 2 to 4, 2017, versus Chicago and Tampa Bay.

Even more impressive, Bergeron's streak kicked off by swiping seven in a row from Jonathan Toews, another beast in the dots.

10. Lindy Ruff casually roasting P.K. Subban during Sunday's post-win address to his New Jersey Devils players is a thing of beauty. Great comic timing.

He gets it! <https://t.co/OLCzgKIZTT>

— P.K. Subban (@PKSubban1) February 1, 2021

We only tease the ones we love — and Subban can take a joke.

The friendly "P.K.'s first game without being a minus" dagger did compel us to look deeper at the minus-5 defender.

Since Ruff took over the Jersey bench, Subban has been given more offensive-zone starts, and his ice time has climbed steadily over the past five outings. Subban is now skating more than 24 minutes a night, his most usage since he was a Norris finalist in 2017-18.

11. Despite their newfound status as division rivals, Darnell Nurse has never forgotten the instrumental role Leafs GM Dubas played in his professional and personal development when the Oilers defenceman was just a 16-year-old kid.

"Kyle was the one who drafted me to Sault Ste. Marie (third overall in 2011), gave me an opportunity to develop. Especially at that age, I was really raw when I came into the (Ontario Hockey) League. Kyle not only pushed me to become better as a player but also as a person, whether it was the schoolroom hitting the books or on the ice," Nurse says. "I'm always so grateful for the opportunity and all the guidance he gave me at that point. For me, it's good to see his own success at this level."

Nurse recalls Dubas monitoring his high school grades and sending him articles that would spur the young athlete to look at things with a different perspective.

"That was always kind of cool to have your new GM reach out and having that kind of connection," Nurse says. "There's so much more to life than just playing the game of hockey."

12. Almost as wonderful as Connor McDavid's end-to-end rush through all the Maple Leafs last Saturday night was the look on his face afterward.

McDavid didn't speak to the media after his three-point show, but that smile said it all. He later tweeted out a photo of his post-goal reaction.

It's not enough for McDavid to reel off six consecutive multipoint efforts or threaten 100 points in a 56-game slate.

The greats chase great moments.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Make no mistake: McDavid wants to score those goals that feel like five, the ones that get replayed at 2 a.m. over Christmastime on sports channels' best-of-the-year packages.

Just as meaningful as what he accomplishes are the how and against whom.

Consider the way McDavid contextualized his ankle-breaking stunner on Morgan Rielly and these same Leafs, a Goal of the Year contender in 2020.

"It's something I take a lot of pride in, to try and be in that category each and every year," McDavid said a few months ago. "To score that in my hometown in front of lots of friends and family, that was special — especially [because] the Oilers and myself have struggled playing in Toronto in past years."

Fresh fit @adidashockey #ReverseRetro pic.twitter.com/hsUxcXP0us

— Connor McDavid (@cmcdavid97) February 1, 2021

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TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs Toronto

That was the response. That was the Vancouver Canucks answer to their worst loss of the season. That was their best attempt to make systematic and line-up changes and take their best shot at an opponent that exposed them brutally on Thursday night. Woof.

Jeff Paterson and Braden Holtby

TAKEAWAYS

That was the response. That was the Vancouver Canucks answer to their worst loss of the season. That was their best attempt to make systematic and line-up changes and take their best shot at an opponent that exposed them brutally on Thursday night. Woof. There's no other way to describe it. All you really need to know about Saturday's 5-1 loss to the Leafs is that it took the Canucks nine minutes to attempt a shot on goal. Did I mention this was their response game? When Justin Bailey rolled a puck on goal from 42-feet out to provide proof that the Canucks were in fact sharing the same ice surface with the Leafs, Toronto already had seven of their own shots and a 1-0 lead. The issue with Canucks right now isn't their 6-9 record. To be perfectly honest, the record is one of the best things about the hockey club these days. It's the way they're playing and the way they're losing. Fans can accept defeat if effort is evident and complete buy-in is on full display. But it's hard to stomach the lack of pushback offered up by the hockey club on this four game losing streak during which the Canucks have been outscored 23-9. To hear the players tell it post game, they're not far off. That's not likely a view shared by many who watch the games.

Travis Green opted for a line-up that included eight players 31-years of age or older on Saturday in Toronto. Youth movement be damned. Clearly, the coach was appealing to his veterans' sensibility and their professional pride in an attempt to stem the recent bleeding (besides the guys that sat certainly haven't set the world on fire). The game plan included turning to 35-year-old Loui Eriksson for the first time this season in the hope of playing a safer, lower-event style than the Canucks have displayed at any point this season. So what happened? 34-year-old Alex Edler took a slashing penalty just 3:19 seconds into the game. And with five other members of the 31+ club on the ice — Brandon Sutter, Antoine Roussel, Tyler Myers and Jordie Benn along with goalie Braden Holtby — the Canucks surrendered the game's opening goal to Wayne Simmonds on a Toronto power play. Benn dropped down to take away a passing lane to Auston Matthews at the back post, but Simmonds had all kinds of time and used it to roof the puck short-side on Holtby. This is not to pin the loss entirely on the veteran players. It's simply to point out that the

team elected to go with a line-up full of experience — the oldest line-up possible, in fact — hoping to change its fortunes. That strategy did not pay off and now the team is left to try to find another game plan in time for Monday now in desperate need of salvaging something out of this three game set with the Leafs.

It was not a banner night for Edler and his defense partner Jalen Chatfield. Edler took a pair of minor penalties in the game's first 5:03 and as mentioned was in the box for the 1-0 goal by Simmonds. Edler then stumbled at his own blueline in an attempt to make a play on the puck which backfired and allowed Auston Matthews to blow past a static Chatfield on the 2-0 goal. That pair was also victimized on the 3-0 goal 7:36 into the second period when Chatfield got caught puck watching as the Leafs attacked the Canucks zone. Zach Hyman deposited both the puck and Edler into the Vancouver net adding insult to injury as the Leafs extended their lead. On the night, Chatfield was on the ice for all four of Toronto's even-strength goals while Edler was on the ice for two of them. Edler, of course, was beaten cleanly by Jason Spezza in the third period of Thursday's game. The Leafs speed will cause problems for many defenders in the NHL North Division so Edler won't be the only one. But 15 games into this new season, Edler is in familiar territory. At night's end on Saturday, he was one behind San Jose's Evander Kane for the NHL lead in minor penalties taken with nine in 14 games. The league gets faster every year and it seems there are questions about whether Edler can keep up.

It was apparent on Thursday and reinforced on Saturday night. The Leafs superstars are at a level higher than the Canucks top players right now. Auston Matthews has blitzed the Canucks for two goals in each of these first two meetings while Mitch Marner had three primary assists on Saturday to go along with a goal and two helpers in Thursday's victory. Those two have had their way with the Canuck defenders. With Matthews on the ice at even-strength Saturday, the Leafs held a 4-0 goal advantage, carried 77.7% of the expected goals, outshot the Canucks 10-4, outchanced them 16-5 and held a 7-1 edge in high danger scoring opportunities. Somebody throw in the towel, please. The Canucks continue to wait for their best players to get fully invested and be the difference makers they were on many nights last season. Until that happens, the team will continue to struggle. Sure, Brock Boeser scored his ninth of the season on a late power play with the game out of reach. But this was yet another night where the Canucks were let down by their best players while the Leafs stars are surely counting down the minutes until puck drop on Monday and another chance to face the Canucks.

There is something rotten with this Canucks team right now. It doesn't seem to matter which buttons the head coach pushes, he can't get a response. He called a timeout in Montreal on Monday night with his team flailing and down 5-1 to the Habs. It made no difference and garnered no reaction from the players. He made line-up changes on Saturday and they had no impact. He hasn't been able to get his best players or the team's power play to remotely resemble the powerhouse bunch they were last season. He is clearly frustrated and it's clear to see and hear in his post-game Zooms. It's also understandable given the nightly outcomes. But it is the coach's job to have answers to questions off the ice and to have solutions to problems on the ice. This is his team and right now it feels like the team is drifting aimlessly. It wasn't that long ago that the same coach was deservedly getting credit for his role in the Canucks playoff success. Last summer, he seemed to be able to affect change with his strategy, decisions and adjustments. Right now, none of that is happening. And it is fair to wonder how long that can continue? Again, this isn't about wins and losses. It's all about the way the losses have looked and felt — and just how resounding they've been lately. This is pro sports and it's a bottom line business. I don't believe the players have quit on the coach, but he needs to prove that he still has command of this group. And it would be a nice change to see him have the team ready to all play like they give a damn from the drop of the puck on Monday night.

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TSN.CA / Simmonds makes immediate impact on Tavares-Nylander line

Since starting on the fourth line, Wayne Simmonds has seen his role steadily increase. He was promoted to Toronto's second unit alongside John Tavares and William Nylander ahead of Thursday's game against the Canucks where he made an immediate impact, Mark Masters writes.

Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs held an optional skate on Saturday morning. The Canucks held a full skate.

John Tavares and Wayne Simmonds will often reminisce about helping Team Canada win gold at the 2008 World Juniors.

"We had a lot of fun," Tavares recalled with a smile. "We've had a chuckle from time to time not just as teammates now, but any time we bumped into each other."

The title run in the Czech Republic featured plenty of twists and turns. Canada lost to Sweden in the preliminary round before exacting revenge in the final. Sweden tied the gold-medal game in the final minute of the third period before Matt Halischuk played the hero in overtime.

"It was a great run, a great tournament and we won it in great fashion so [those are] memories we have together for the rest of our lives," Tavares said. "Great to be here now many years later and playing together and being on the same team and chasing another championship."

Tavares and Simmonds aren't just teammates again, right now they are linemates. Simmonds was promoted to Toronto's second unit alongside Tavares and William Nylander ahead of Thursday's game against the Canucks.

"It went pretty good," said Tavares, who scored his first five-on-five goal of the season. "We got better as the night went on so just want to build off that."

Shots favoured the Leafs 7-3 when that line was on the ice.

Since starting on the fourth line, Simmonds has seen his role steadily increase. He played a season high 14 minutes and 40 seconds against Vancouver.

"He did a good job," said head coach Sheldon Keefe. "He's showing lots of jump. He's skating really well and being able to sustain it consistently throughout games. He does a great job of keeping the shifts short. He gets off the ice before things get real difficult on his shift and trusts his teammates to go out and do the job."

Simmonds is averaging 42 seconds per shift this season, which is lowest among Toronto's top-nine forwards.

"His minutes have increased greatly as the season has gone on and we've seen real benefits to that in terms of his confidence and his puck play," Keefe said. "Because of how he works and goes to the net and disrupts things on the forecheck, he creates a lot more loose pucks and zone time for John and Will so that was that was good to see."

Simmonds makes good first impression with Tavares-Nylander

John Tavares says his line of William Nylander and Wayne Simmonds improved as the game went on against the Canucks and are hoping to build off that chemistry during their rematch tonight.

Simmonds was jostling with Canucks defenceman Tyler Myers in front of the net when Nylander set up Tavares for a tap-in goal on Thursday. It was only the latest sweet set-up by Nylander this season.

"Willy's game really is the full package. [He's] a dual-threat option," Tavares observed. "He's extremely strong on the puck and competitive on it, which is something that's very underrated for him and maybe doesn't get recognized enough."

Among the Leafs, only Mitch Marner (11) has more assists than Nylander (eight) so far this season.

Tic-Tac-Toe 🍌 #LeafsForever pic.twitter.com/vvQpMHSjW

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) February 5, 2021

Nylander also picked up an assist on a Jason Spezza power-play goal on Thursday. Toronto has struck on the man advantage in 10 of 11 games and is benefiting from rolling out two balanced units.

"There is some competition there," noted Keefe. "That's how we had designed it and what we hoped would materialize. Both units have found success."

Auston Matthews and Marner anchor one unit while Tavares and Nylander lead the other one.

"We've got some real good competition happening there," Keefe continued. "We've been able to spread it out well. I think, as you've seen at different times, we do blend the two units together whether the game we feel has called for it or within line changes and things like that, but we like the balance that we've had with it and the players have responded very well."

Seven different Leafs have scored on the power play already this season.

Tavares says Nylander's strength on the puck is 'very underrated'

John Tavares believes William Nylander's strength on the puck is very underrated and says he has a lot of versatility in his game which has benefitted their line.

The Canucks never really got their legs going on Thursday night as they played for the 14th time in 23 days.

"We got to skate better than we did last game," said coach Travis Green. "We looked half a step to a whole step behind a very fast team."

Vancouver will bring some fresh bodies into the lineup today with Loui Eriksson and Justin Bailey both projected to make their season debuts. Eriksson skated alongside Bo Horvat and Tanner Pearson this morning while Bailey joined Brandon Sutter and Nils Hoglander.

"I don't think we're a team that's built to chase teams from behind," Green noted. "We're not a high-flying team throughout our lineup. Our game is a little more methodical when we're playing well. We tend to start the game in an even manner and slowly apply pressure as the game goes on by being relentless and being on top of our details and that's kind of part of the game that's gotten away from us a little bit."

The Leafs are looking to win back-to-back games against the same team for the second time this season. They previously accomplished the feat in Calgary during their recent Alberta road trip. Keefe reiterated to his group that it's hard to post consecutive wins against a quality opponent.

"We talked about that this morning," the coach said. "The other team, in this case Vancouver, is going to push back. They're going to be a lot more focused. They had another day off yesterday. That's two out of the last three days off. They'll have a lot more energy and legs here today. It's going to be a much different game and we've got to be prepared for that."

'The way we've been playing is unacceptable': Canucks eye rebound against Leafs



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Canucks have dropped three straight games and take on a Maple Leafs team tonight that scored a season-high seven goals against them on Thursday. As head coach Travis Green explains, Vancouver isn't built to be chasing games and the players know they need to be better in the defensive end in order to have success.

The Lotto Line featuring Elias Pettersson between J.T. Miller and Brock Boeser was reunited at the morning skate. They are focused on being more responsible defensively.

"If we take care of that and be better defensively, really commit to it, that will allow us to get more turnovers, get to pucks and get in the offensive zone more and that's where we do our best work," Boeser said.

"We got to be smarter with the puck," said Pettersson. "We got to be better at protecting it. It's been a lot of one and done. We're coming into the offensive zone, we shoot the puck and don't win it back. We got to win more puck battles. We got to be better at protecting the puck, especially me, I've been a lot of one and done and I need to protect it better and make smarter plays with it."

A lack of clean break outs has prevented the line from building momentum.

"It gets pretty quiet sometimes and we've been harping on that so we need to talk better," said Boeser. "If we talk and know where each other are and make those small passes it will allow us to break out cleaner."

Pettersson on Canucks fans' frustrations building: 'I'm definitely aware of it'

Vancouver was the last Canadian team standing in the playoffs last year, but have struggled to a 6-8 start this season after key pieces walked away in free agency. Elias Pettersson says he's aware of the fan base's frustrations and wants to win just as much as they do.

Pettersson only has one assist in four career games against the Leafs, but the Swede plays a prominent role in Toronto's pre-scout.

"His ability to shoot the puck is one thing," said defenceman Justin Holl when asked what stands out. "He can really wire it. He can also get himself into dangerous places on the ice. We went over it on video a little bit. All the good players want the middle of the ice so a big key for us is to deny the middle and keep them to the outside. He's one of the guys who does a really good job of finding himself in the middle."

As the Canucks navigate a tough start to the season, Pettersson was asked who he leans on for support and advice. The 21-year-old described himself as a "lone wolf."

"I'm used to working on my own stuff either looking at video or just coming up with new ideas to be better," Pettersson said. "But, of course, there's always coaches there to help me."

Leafs' Holl on 'out of control' hair, challenge against Pettersson

Justin Holl explains what inspired his long locks this season and says quarantine had a lot to do with it. He also touches on Elias Pettersson and what makes him an offensive threat that they need to be aware of.

Projected Leafs line-up based on Friday's practice:

Hyman - Matthews - Marner

Nylander - Tavares - Simmonds

Vesey - Kerfoot - Mikheyev

Petan - Boyd - Spezza

Rielly - Brodie

Muzzin - Holl

Lehtonen - Bogosian

Andersen starts

Hutchinson

Lines at Canucks morning skate on Saturday:

Miller - Pettersson - Boeser

Pearson - Horvat - Eriksson

Bailey - Sutter - Hoglander

Motte - Beagle - Roussel

Hughes - Benn

Schmidt - Myers

Edler - Chatfield

Holtby starts

Demko

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TSN.CA / Canucks vs Maple Leafs Gameday Preview

The Canucks look to avoid a 4-game losing streak as they once again take on the Maple Leafs in Toronto today.

Jeff Paterson

VANCOUVER – The Vancouver Canucks (6-8) look to avoid a season-high four-game losing skid when they face the Toronto Maple Leafs (8-2-1) for a second straight game at Scotiabank Arena.

On Thursday, the Canucks fell 7-3 to the Leafs. Tanner Pearson, Bo Horvat and JT Miller scored the Vancouver goals while Thatcher Demko stopped 32 shots in net. Pearson has scored in back to back games and four of his last seven while Horvat snapped a six-game goal drought with his second period marker. Elias Pettersson had an assist on the Pearson goal and now has 3+4=7 in his last six games.

Interestingly, a quarter of a way through the Canucks 56-game season, Pettersson has had a pair of multi-point games but has yet to have a multi-goal or multi-assist outing.

In an attempt to bump their slump, the Canucks will make several line-up changes tonight. Braden Holtby returns to the net for the first time since a 6-2 loss in Montreal on Monday. Loui Eriksson and Justin Bailey are expected to make their season debuts which means Jake Virtanen and Adam Gaudette both come out of the line-up joining Zack MacEwen in the press box. For Eriksson this will be career game 971 moving him one in front of Canucks head coach Travis Green on the all-time games played list.

Offense has not been an issue for the Canucks this season. The Canucks average 3.36 goals per game and have scored three or more in nine of their 14 outings. It's at the other end of the ice that problems have arisen. The Canucks have allowed 18 goals in their past three contests and a league-high 55 on the season (3.93 per game). The team has surrendered five goals or more in three straight and eight of the 14 games it has played.

The Canucks are 6-1 when opening the scoring this season, but have not won yet (0-7) when falling behind in a hockey game. Further to that, they



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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have not held a lead at any point of the seven games they have trailed 1-0.

After opening the season with a 5-3 win in Edmonton on January 13th, the Canucks are now 1-6 in their last seven road games with the lone victory coming last Saturday in Winnipeg. Going back to last regular season ahead of the COVID pause (and the neutral site playoff bubble in Edmonton last summer), the Canucks are 3-11-1 in their last 15 games away from Rogers Arena.

The Leafs are on a roll after Thursday's victory. They are 7-1-1 in their last nine hockey games. Jason Spezza was the unlikely scoring star against the Canucks. The 37-year-old scored once in each period to record his eighth NHL hat trick. Auston Matthews had a pair of goals while Mitch Marner and John Tavares had the others.

Matthews opened the scoring and later added his team-leading eighth of the season. He now has seven goals on a six-game goal streak. The last Maple Leafs to score in seven straight games were Dave Andreychuk in January 1994 and Wendel Clark who did so months earlier (November 1993) in that 1993-94 season.

Marner had 1+2=3 on Thursday and now has 3+8=11 on a six-game point streak.

Defenseman Travis Dermott left Thursday's game with a leg injury and will not play tonight. He'll be replaced by Mikko Lehtonen on the Leafs blue line.

The Canucks have dropped their last eight games in Toronto which dates back to a 5-3 victory on December 17, 2011. These teams will wrap up this three game series with another match-up on Monday.

POSSIBLE CANUCKS LINE-UP

Miller-Pettersson-Boeser

Pearson-Horvat-Eriksson

Bailey-Sutter-Höglander

Motte-Beagle-Roussel

Hughes-Benn

Schmidt-Myers

Edler-Chatfield

Holby

POSSIBLE LEAFS LINE-UP

Hyman-Matthews-Marner

Nylander-Tavares-Simmonds

Vesey-Kerfoot-Mikheyev

Petan-Boyd-Spezza

Rielly-Brodie

Muzzin-Holl

Lehtonen-Bogosian

Andersen

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USA TODAY / NHL reschedules 27 games in East Division

Staff Writer

The NHL did a massive rewrite of its East Division schedule Saturday, shifting 27 games to accommodate new dates for postponed New Jersey Devils and Buffalo Sabres games.

As of Friday night, the Devils had 17 players on the COVID-19 protocol list, which can mean, among other reasons, an initial positive test, someone showing symptoms or possible exposure to someone who tested positive.

The Devils will have a fourth game postponed and rescheduled.

The Sabres had five players in protocol, plus the team announced that coach Ralph Krueger had tested positive. Four of their games had been postponed.

The Colorado Avalanche and Minnesota Wild also have had games postponed, though those have yet to be rescheduled. All told, 27 NHL games have been postpone

Super Bowl 55 predictions: Chiefs or Bucs for NFL championship?

Bucs star lost finger, broke neck still 'shocked the world'

The schedule revisions (all times p.m. ET):

Philadelphia at N.Y. Rangers, originally Feb. 16, now Feb. 14 at 6

New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers, originally March 4, now Feb. 16 at 7

Buffalo at Washington, originally April 13, now Feb. 18 at 7

Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders, originally Feb. 2, now Feb. 22 at 7

Buffalo at New Jersey, originally Feb. 22, now Feb. 23 at 7

New Jersey at Buffalo, originally April 9, now Feb. 25 at 7

Philadelphia at Buffalo, originally Feb. 26, now Feb. 27 at 1

Washington at New Jersey, originally March 1, now Feb. 28 at 3

N.Y. Islanders at New Jersey, originally Feb. 23, now March 2 at 7

N.Y. Rangers at New Jersey, originally Feb. 6, now March 4 at 7

Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders, originally Feb. 4, now March 4 at 7

N.Y. Rangers at New Jersey, originally March 5, now March 6 at 1

Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders, originally March 5, now March 6 at 1

Pittsburgh at New Jersey, originally Feb. 9, now March 18 at 7

Pittsburgh at New Jersey, originally March 19, now March 20 at 1

New Jersey at Pittsburgh, originally Feb. 2, now March 21 at 1

N.Y. Islanders at Boston, originally March 27, now March 23 at 7

Buffalo at Pittsburgh, originally March 26, now March 25 at 7

Buffalo at Boston, originally Feb. 6, now March 27 at 1

N.Y. Islanders at Pittsburgh, originally March 30, now March 27 at 7

Philadelphia at Buffalo, originally March 30, now March 31 at 7:30

Philadelphia at New Jersey, originally April 20, now April 1 at 7

Pittsburgh at New Jersey, originally March 21, now April 9 at 7

Buffalo at Boston, originally Feb. 8, now April 13 at 7

N.Y. Islanders at Boston, originally April 13, now April 14 at 6

Pittsburgh at Buffalo, originally April 19, now April 18 at 3

New Jersey at Pittsburgh, originally Feb. 4, now April 20 at 7

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