



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 15, 2021

## THE ATHLETIC

### NHL Trade Grades: Blue Jackets dealing 7th-round pick to Canes could be a big win

By Corey Pronman, Dom Luszczyszyn and more

Corey Pronman, Dom Luszczyszyn and Craig Custance grade the notable NHL trades of the season.

The trade:

The Columbus Blue Jackets acquired the rights to forward Gregory Hofmann.

The Carolina Hurricanes acquired a 2022 seventh-round pick.

Pronman: Prospect fans will remember Hofmann coming up periodically in the last 10 years, such as when he had a decent world juniors in 2012 or strong appearances at the world championships in more recent years. Now 28, Hofmann is considered a solid NHL prospect by NHL scouts after being great in the top Swiss league.

After being picked by the Hurricanes in the fourth round in 2011, his rights remained with Carolina all this time because Switzerland, like Russia, does not have a transfer agreement with the NHL. Sources around the league think the Hurricanes and Hofmann were unable to agree to terms in recent years so that is why he stayed in Switzerland; the reasons for that are unknown.

Hofmann is a skilled forward with great offensive instincts. He makes a lot of plays and does so with pace. Typically when you sign a 28-year-old European scorer, you're getting a guy with average size and skating, but Hofmann is different in that he's not undersized and he's a very good skater, above-average for the NHL, which is why I think his game will translate to the NHL. He's not great off the puck and won't be a penalty killer in the NHL, but I think the skating and skill combination is good enough to take a regular shift at even strength and be a useful contributor in the bottom six.

Hofmann is 28 and has never played at a club level higher than the Swiss league. He's not so talented that he's a sure thing, and Columbus has to get him to sign on the dotted line, but for a seventh-round pick, this is a nice gamble. Carolina recoups a later pick in the 2022 draft for a player. The Athletic's Aaron Portzline says Hofmann could join Columbus in the near future.

Columbus grade: B

Carolina grade: D

Jets and Blue Jackets swap stars Patrik Laine and Pierre-Luc Dubois

The trade:

The Winnipeg Jets receive center Pierre-Luc Dubois and a 2022 third-round pick.

The Columbus Blue Jackets receive winger Patrik Laine and center Jack Roslovic. The Jets retain 26 percent of Laine's salary.

Grading the Blue Jackets

CUSTANCE: In Patrik Laine, the Blue Jackets get the exact type of player they need. And have needed for a long time.

"They didn't have the difference-maker skill guy — the Crosby, the Kane," said an NHL executive on Saturday after the deal. "When they had (Artemi) Panarin, he drove the whole offense. They needed that dynamic."

The Blue Jackets get an edge here because of the upside this trade provides, even in giving up one of the hardest things in hockey to get, a top-line center. Laine has a rare skillset with an incredible shot and incredible release, and we still haven't seen his ceiling in terms of goal-scoring. Jack Roslovic is probably a third-line forward. But maybe not.

"I watched Roslovic when he played for Manitoba and he was a better player than (Kyle) Connor in the American Hockey League," said an NHL talent evaluator. "The guy is really skilled, can make plays. The Blue Jackets need a center. He's going to get every opportunity in the world to go in there and shine."

Said a scout of Roslovic: "I would project him as a third-line center, if I'm betting on it."

There are still questions that need to be answered for this trade to be a win for the Blue Jackets. Most notably, what does Laine's next contract look like? Getting star players to stay in the market has been a problem for the Blue Jackets, but a league source suggested that GM Jarmo Kekalainen doesn't make this trade if he wasn't absolutely confident he can lock in Laine long-term.

The other question is pretty simple: Who is going to get him the puck? As much as this trade fills a hole for Columbus, it creates one too.

"I don't know how this will work out for Columbus," said another executive. "Does Columbus have a (Mark) Scheifele for (Laine) to play with? This may be a challenge for them."

Grade: A-

LUSZCZYSZYN: Laine is an extremely intriguing player and it'll be very interesting to see how he fits with the Blue Jackets — and what version of him the team gets. The one from the last couple of seasons isn't enough and it's why Winnipeg probably wins the trade for now as Laine's star has fallen. That Laine is worth around 1.7 wins, can put up points but not do much else, while being an extreme liability on defense. Being one of the league's worst defensive players takes a lot away from his offensive value. Laine's contract is also up after this season and he has one less year of team control, too. That plays a role in the trade evaluation.



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Columbus was in an untenable situation with Dubois, and considering those circumstances, it's difficult to hate the return here even if Laine isn't the player he was in his first two seasons. The hope is that he can get back to that level and that's not difficult to imagine in a new situation, even if it is under Columbus coach John Tortorella.

The Blue Jackets desperately need a pure goal-scorer and that's where things get interesting with Laine. He'll surely be a very strong asset on the power play, but is he a guy who can create goals on his own or does he need help at five-on-five? His weak play-driving numbers suggest he needs help and while he won't have nearly as much in Columbus, I can see him fitting well next to Max Domi, one of the game's most underrated passers. That duo will need some serious defensive help though.

I don't rate Roslovic very highly with his value being just barely above the third-round pick going the other way, but he's an interesting flier given his pedigree. He needs to prove more at five-on-five, but maybe just needs to play with better players. Being stuck in Winnipeg's bottom-six likely hasn't helped showcase his ability, though I'm not sure that's going to change in Columbus.

Grade: B

**PRONMAN:** Laine is a divisive figure in the scouting community. Scouts don't like his compete level, they don't like his skating, describing both as poor, and typically wingers who play like that aren't viewed as elite NHL assets. On the other hand, some scouts love him because he is 6-foot-4, he has elite skill and he has one of the best shots you will ever see. While known as a goal-scorer, he has high hockey IQ and is a great passer. Laine has put up massive numbers over his career at various levels.

According to Hockey Reference, the most NHL points by a player through their age-21 season since 1990 have been:

Sidney Crosby: 397  
Steven Stamkos: 329  
Jaromir Jagr: 319  
Connor McDavid: 256  
Mats Sundin: 249  
Patrik Laine: 247  
Eric Lindros: 242  
Patrick Kane: 230

Hockey Reference uses a January cutoff so Connor McDavid lost his final season in the data. Regardless, Laine is in good company.

I do get the concerns on Laine. He will have stretches where he causes some headaches, and when the game gets faster and harder, it's reasonable to wonder if he can be an impact player at that level, although he does have 16 points in 24 NHL playoff games.

With that said, he is a game-breaking offensive player, and he is a player I think will regularly be among the top goal and point scorers in the NHL. When I recently evaluated the best U23 players in the league, I assessed Laine as the No. 5 player, someone who was on the bubble between one of the best players in the league and an all-star. I stand by that assessment despite his warts. I think Columbus gets the best player in this deal in Laine.

Roslovic is also worth noting. He is an excellent skater with some skill. He's not close to the caliber of the other two players moved in this deal, but he could be an effective middle-six forward in the NHL.

Grade: B+

Grading the Jets

**CUSTANCE:** Ignoring the iso-cam that featured Dubois mailing in a recent shift, we're only a few months removed from the 22-year-old center blowing everybody away with his performance in the bubble. On a championship team, he's maybe a No. 2 center. And with Mark Scheifele in Winnipeg, he gets to play that role.

In our recent Player Tiers package, he was in the Top 100. Laine was not. People in the game really like Dubois, even if his reputation might have taken a slight hit in the recent weeks. In debating Dubois versus other great players for that piece, one executive made this conclusion: "I'm taking Dubois' next five years over (Steven) Stamkos."

Successful teams build down the middle and one scout pointed out that the Jets now have the center depth to compete with other teams in the Canadian division.

"In that Canadian group, there were teams better down the middle than them," said the scout. "Now, there are not."

Dubois fills a need but the Jets have to be completely confident they're getting the player who helped upset the Maple Leafs and not the player we've seen this season.

"He's the total package," said a scout of Dubois. "His game is driven off hockey sense, power in tight areas, making quick plays. ... He's really good in traffic. If his legs aren't moving and he's trying to play stationary, he can look how it looked the other night."

Grade: B+

**LUSZCZYSZYN:** Based on my Twitter mentions from this morning, it's apparently a little spicy to say the Jets got the best player in the deal in Dubois. Laine is obviously the flashier player, a guy who can fill the net with pucks. But Dubois is a much more complete player at a more valuable position. There's a reason Dubois made our top 100 player tiers and Laine didn't.

Dubois can drive play well at both ends of the ice, is a terrific playmaker and an excellent puck-carrier. The Blue Jackets' expected goal differential has been 0.2 per 60 better with Dubois on the ice since the 2018-19, a solid mark for a player with strong two-way upside. There's a reason his best comp is Aleksander Barkov, and it wouldn't be a shock at all to see Dubois grow into one of the league's best centers. By GSWA, Dubois is currently projected to be worth about 2.2 wins, assuming he gets the bigger role he's looking for.

It's also worth noting that at five-on-five Dubois has actually had better production over the last two seasons, scoring 0.97 goals-per-60 and 2.07 points-per-60 to Laine's 0.8 and 1.68 respectively. Laine did have the edge last season, but there's also a big difference in producing offense in Winnipeg and Columbus considering the offensive supporting casts on each team. Dubois should have much more help in Winnipeg, which should increase his point totals.



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I am a bit surprised the Blue Jackets were the ones who had to add the pick (well, not really, but I don't think they should've), though a third isn't much with a projected value of 0.7 wins over seven years. Either way, it's a nice sweetener for the Jets who were arguably already getting the top player.

Grade: A-

PRONMAN: The first thing any scout I talk to about Dubois will mention is his playoff run from last summer where he was a true standout for Columbus. Hockey is a unique sport in that the rules implicitly change from the regular season to the playoffs. Players who are viewed as being able to play a harder style are viewed as more valuable in the postseason. Dubois, who is a 6-foot-2 center and competes at a high level with great skill and hockey sense, is viewed as a premium asset in the highest leverage environments.

Do I necessarily agree with that sentiment? I think it's very credible, but I have my hesitations. I don't think you want to overreact too much to a 10-game run. I don't view Dubois' skating as a strong point or think his skill level is elite, so you

have to balance all that information. I also think it's fair to criticize a player known for his compete and strong character being involved in the drama of recent weeks.

After digging into Dubois the last week and talking to a bunch of sources, I probably was a little too harsh in my most recent evaluation of him in my U23 ranking. I categorized him in the "bubble of NHL all-star and top of lineup player," when he should have been in the NHL all-star category. I've moved him up after being swayed by what he did in the postseason and upgrading his puck skills grade.

I would still prefer Laine just because I see some exceptional elements in his game that I don't in Dubois, but I think it's reasonable to prefer one over the other given the latter is more well-rounded and plays a more premium position.

I view Dubois as a star No. 1 center in the NHL. Playing with Scheifele will give the Jets one of the best 1-2 punches down the middle in the league.

Grade: B-



## Rapid Trade Reactions: Canes Add Grit, Depth to Lineup

GM Don Waddell provides insight into trade

By Michael Smith

Saturday in Dallas began like any other gameday this season.

A team breakfast at the hotel. Treatment. Taxi squad on the ice. Virtual meetings. Lunch. It wasn't too far past noon central time when news broke of a trade.

The Carolina Hurricanes acquired forwards Cedric Paquette and Alex Galchenyuk from the Ottawa Senators in exchange for forward Ryan Dzingel, a move that shakes up the Canes lineup and frees up valuable salary cap space in the process.

While packing up in my Dallas hotel room on Saturday afternoon, I caught up with Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell over the phone so he could provide some insight into the trade.

How did this trade come about?

Waddell said the Canes had talked to "some teams for a while now" about Dzingel, who totaled 33 points (10g, 23a) in 75 games since signing with the Canes as a free agent in July 2019.

"He was looking for a change of scenery," Waddell said. "He hasn't fit into our top nine, and he's not a fourth-line player. He was a little frustrated with his playing time."

"Zinger was a good player for us. It just wasn't the right fit as far as finding him the right role," head coach Rod

Brind'Amour said in his postgame Zoom remarks on Saturday night. "It just didn't quite work out."

Ottawa was a team with which the Canes had regular contact, and the two teams struck up conversation again on Saturday morning. A few hours later, a deal that benefitted all parties involved was done.

"They need goal scoring. They had Ryan before, and he scored goals there," Waddell said. "We were able to figure a deal that made sense."

What are the Canes getting in Cedric Paquette?

Paquette is a gritty, hard-nosed center that can provide depth down the middle and bring a needed element of sandpaper to the forward group. He might not chip in much on the scoresheet, but he doesn't have to given the role that's carved out for him.

"He knows his role, and he plays the game hard. It's something we felt we needed to add to our group, particularly to our forward group," Waddell said. "We score goals. We're not worried about goals; we're worried about defending and being tougher to play against, and he matches that up real well."

Waddell said Paquette is a player the Canes have scouted before, and they got a good look at him in the playoff bubble(s). There, he skated in all 25 of Tampa Bay's 2020 postseason games and recorded three assists as the Lightning captured the Stanley Cup. That winning pedigree carries weight, too.



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"You want to surround yourself with winners," Waddell said. "Once you taste winning at any level, particularly at our level winning the Stanley Cup, there's nothing like that."

What do Paquette's new teammates think?

In their postgame availabilities on Saturday night, a couple of Canes were asked about the addition of Paquette.

"Usually I'm not a big fan of Cedric Paquette playing against him," Jake Gardiner smiled. "That's a good sign for a teammate. To have a guy like that is going to be huge for us."

"He's in on the forecheck, he hits and he plays that hard-nosed game. I'm excited to have him," Jordan Martinook said. "To have that heavy fourth line, that's something that's crucial."

Where does Alex Galchenyuk fit in?

It's clear Galchenyuk is a skilled player. In the 2015-16, he recorded career highs in goals (30) and points (56) with the Montreal Canadiens. A player, especially one like Galchenyuk who was selected third overall in the 2012 NHL Draft, doesn't just luck into a 30-goal season in the National Hockey League.

But this is Galchenyuk's sixth team in the last four seasons, and his immediate future with the Canes is still to be determined.

"He's a skilled player," Waddell said. "He has to be put in the right situations to succeed, so we're talking further how that fits in with our group. We'll see how things transpire over the next period of time."

UPDATE: The Canes placed Galchenyuk on waivers on Sunday. Galchenyuk will remain in Canada for the next 24

### Preview: Blue Jackets vs. Hurricanes

Canes host Columbus to begin five-game homestand

By Michael Smith

After earning eight of a possible 12 points on a six-game road swing, the Carolina Hurricanes return to PNC Arena for five games in eight days.

Up first in the homestand is a one-off match-up against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The Match-Up

Columbus Blue Jackets (7-5-4, 18 points) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (9-3-0, 18 points)

Monday, Feb. 15, 7 p.m.

Watch: FOX Sports Carolinas, FOX Sports GO

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

Tracking the Storylines

Homecoming: The Canes have played nine of their first 12 games of the season on the road. Only San Jose has played fewer home games (1) than the Canes (3), and that's only

hours or so until he either clears waivers or is claimed by another team.

Given COVID-19 protocols and quarantine requirements, when could Paquette make his debut for the Canes?

"I think it could be as early as Monday," Waddell said.

On Saturday afternoon, the Canes were working through logistics of how they could remain compliant with the NHL's COVID-19 protocols and avoid a lengthy quarantine for their newcomers. As of Sunday, Paquette is en route to Raleigh, making the drive down from Ottawa with his dog, Moka.

"If they're either driving with no hotels or flying private, there's no quarantine necessary," Waddell said. "We think we could have them pretty immediately."

How does this trade affect the Canes' salary cap?

Even though the Canes acquired two players in exchange for one, they're actually saving money both in actual cash and on the salary cap. With Dzingel's \$3.375 million cap hit heading north, the Canes free up \$675,000 in cap space.

Recall, the Canes played down a skater in Columbus on Feb. 8 because of a cap crunch that was handcuffing the team (but in doing so, they unlocked an emergency roster exception, should the team encounter a similar situation moving forward). Any cap flexibility - no matter how big or small - is precious as the season progresses.

"We're giving ourselves some breathing room," Waddell said. "You never know when that one deal might come along, and you want to make sure you're in a position to capitalize on it to make your team better. This gives us much more opportunity as we move forward."

because they couldn't physically play at home because of local government restrictions. It's a limited sample size, but the Canes are 3-0-0 at home this season with wins against the two Stanley Cup finalists from a year ago.

Paquette's Debut?: The Canes acquired Cedric Paquette from the Ottawa Senators on Saturday. Paquette, along with his dog Moka, drove from Ottawa to Raleigh on Sunday in order to remain compliant with NHL protocols and avoid a lengthy quarantine. The 27-year-old forward could make his debut with the Canes as early as tonight, perhaps centering the fourth line.

The Opposition

Last five games: 3-1-1, 7 points

On the road: 3-3-2, 8 points

CAR vs. CBJ: 1-1-0

Leading scorer: Cam Atkinson, 12 points (5g, 7a) in 15 games

The Blue Jackets have earned points in each of their last three games (2-0-1). Patrik Laine has scored four goals and recorded an assist since joining Columbus, and Jack Roslovic is a point-per-game player with nine points (4g, 5a) in as many games.



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## The Last Meeting

The Canes split a two-game set in Columbus just a week ago, when they scored a touchdown's worth of goals in a 6-5 win on Super Bowl Sunday before the Blue Jackets squeaked out a 3-2 win the very next night.

"It's certainly not a lack of effort," Brind'Amour said after the rematch loss. "We really worked hard tonight being short-staffed on a back-to-back. I thought we grinded it out and probably deserved better."



## Hurricanes host the Blue Jackets following shootout victory

Columbus Blue Jackets (7-5-4, fourth in the Central Division) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (9-3-0, third in the Central Division)

Raleigh, North Carolina; Monday, 7 p.m. EST

**BOTTOM LINE:** The Columbus Blue Jackets visit Carolina after the Hurricanes beat Dallas 4-3 in a shootout.

The Hurricanes are 9-3-0 against Central Division opponents. Carolina is ninth in the NHL recording 9.2 points per game, averaging 3.3 goals and 5.8 assists.

The Blue Jackets are 7-5-4 against Central Division teams. Columbus ranks 14th in the NHL with 28.9 shots per game and is averaging 2.9 goals.

In their last matchup on Feb. 8, Columbus won 3-2.

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Jordan Staal leads the Hurricanes with eight assists and has 12 points this season. Vincent Trocheck has 11 points over the last 10 games for Carolina.

Cam Atkinson leads the Blue Jackets with 12 points, scoring five goals and registering seven assists. Seth Jones has six assists over the last 10 games for Columbus.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Hurricanes: 8-2-0, averaging 3.5 goals, 6.2 assists, 4.1 penalties and 8.5 penalty minutes while giving up 2.8 goals per game with a .901 save percentage.

Blue Jackets: 5-3-2, averaging 3.1 goals, 5.5 assists, 2.6 penalties and six penalty minutes while allowing 3.3 goals per game with a .890 save percentage.

**INJURIES:** Hurricanes: Petr Mrazek: out (thumb).

Blue Jackets: None listed.



## Canadiens' Byron, Hurricanes' Galchenyuk among players placed on waivers

Montreal Canadiens forward Paul Byron and new member of the Carolina Hurricanes Alex Galchenyuk have been placed on waivers, Sportsnet's Chris Johnston reports.

Par Lindholm, Danny DeKeyser and Gabriel Carlsson were also placed on waivers.

Byron, 31, has three assists in 14 games so far this season. The Canadiens said on Twitter that Byron is to join the team's taxi squad.

Galchenyuk and Cedric Paquette were traded from the Ottawa Senators to Carolina in exchange for Ryan Dzingel

on Saturday. Galchenyuk scored once in his eight games played with Ottawa.

This is the sixth NHL team for Galchenyuk in his career. Across 557 games split between the Montreal Canadiens, Arizona Coyotes, Pittsburgh Penguins, Minnesota Wild and Senators, Dzingel has scored 136 goals and added 185 assists.

Edmonton Oilers forward James Neal cleared waivers on Sunday.



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**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## About Last Night: Carolina Hurricanes Stay Perfect in the Shoot Out

The Carolina Hurricanes stay perfect on the season against the Dallas Stars

By Zeke Lukow

The Hurricanes picked up another wild win Saturday night, knocking off Dallas 4-3 in the shootout

Before the game, there was news that Ryan Dzingel was traded to the Ottawa Senators for Cedric Paquette and Alex Galchenyuk. While the quarantine rules are fuzzy, that opened up a place in the lineup for Steven Lorentz. Lorentz has looked great this season with one point in five games. He is a Rod Brind'Amour player who doesn't care about points. Lorentz reminds me of Warren Foegele in his rookie year, just hungry to be part of the lineup every night. After the game, Brind'Amour addressed the roster change.

For sure, in Paquette, we're getting a fourth-line, probably center role, just to help out where we're kind of missing there. Although tonight, I thought Lorentz played great in that spot.

It was great to see that Martin Necas's injury was not as severe as we first thought. Necas returned to action and played his first game in nine days and looked like he was back to normal. When Necas is on the ice it looks like everyone else is skating in quicksand. He is definitely a game changer on the ice. There are rare players who operate at different speeds and you can see that Necas is one of them. He just hasn't been able to turn that game-changing speed into instant goals, but you can see the defense struggle to keep pace.

### Down but Not Out

While this team has seemed to struggle in the middle frame, the Canes came out on top last night. The first goal went to the Stars just six minutes into the second period, and momentum was certainly on the Stars's side, as they were outshooting Carolina 19-12 at the time.

However, it would not be a Rod Brind'Amour team if they couldn't turn it around. With just four minutes left in the period, the Canes would not only find their way back in the game, but they would also be leading it going into the second break.

The Canes had a pair of first-time goal scorers for the season in Jordan Martinook and Teuvo Teravainen, who both converted on shots to give the Canes the lead going into the second intermission.

### Special Teams

The Canes' special teams were giving them the edge all night from the power play that scored the third goal to the penalty kill that put the Canes on defense multiple times.

The downside of the Canes' aggressive forecheck is the fact that an active stick can lead to offensive zone penalties, which the team is all too familiar with. The good news is that in the past two seasons, Carolina is one of the most prolific shorthanded teams. Tonight, they handed their first two penalty kills well, but late into their third, Sebastian Aho's mistake let Dallas back into the game

With just under a minute left in the game, skating into the offensive zone, he got a little too cute with the puck and left a drop pass at the blue line. The Stars were able to pick up the loose puck and spring a five on two rush that tied the game. As a fan, I love the "live by the sword die by the sword" mentality but at a certain point, you just have to play smart. With a minute left you have to get the puck deep and live to fight another day. Lucky for Aho it didn't change the outcome of the game, and only gave Dallas an extra standings point.

### Oh Captain my Captain

Vincent Trocheck had a lot of words before the game to explain Jordain Staal's importance with the team. This year we have seen more than ever what he can bring when he is not THE guy on the team. I have been writing for years that he is the most underrated defensive center.

But as Brind'Amour has mentioned, he is always in the right place, he just hasn't had the luck of pucks going in. Last night he had another moment where the puck luck/creation worked out for him.

Staal now has six points in his last four games, which includes the Canes' last goal against the Stars. He not only shows up on the scoresheet, but he ends the night with a 57% faceoff win rate including the overtime faceoff which always leads into a prolonged Aho possession.

### Goaltending

Alex Nedeljkovic has had promise for years, but once he gets in the net everyone is quick to point out his shortcomings. The facts are, he is a small goalie who has to play aggressive angles to cut off goals. Think Petr Mrazek on steroids. He has to commit to the initial shot and rely on an acrobatic save on the rebound, that's what you do when you are undersized. What he does do well is play the puck. He is incredible to watch when he gets out of the crease to make a move.

While this makes many uncomfortable, he clearly as the ability to start the breakout from below the goal line. One goalie that has done that well that is familiar with Canes fans is Braden Holtby, he has always been able to go from goal line to opposite blue line and spring players. It is a unique and fun ability that he has, do not ruin it by thinking he needs to stay in the crease all the time.



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While we all know for years that the Canes have struggled in the shootout, it was incredible to see the young goaltender thrive against the opposition's best players. Ned was a

perfect three for three in the shootout, including being perfect in overtime. That will do a lot for confidence when it comes to a young goalie in the league.

### Carolina Hurricanes vs. Columbus Blue Jackets: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Canes have a rare one-game stint against a team, this time the Columbus Blue Jackets.

By Zeke Lukow

The Carolina Hurricanes come home tonight to play their fourth home game of the season against the Columbus Blue Jackets. In the last game against Columbus, the Canes lost late in the third period despite the infamous benching of Patrik Laine.

Carolina looks could turn back to James Reimer, who won his first matchup against Columbus, in net. With Joonas Korpisalo playing Saturday, John Tortorella would go to Elvis Merzlikins tonight. Merzlikins, who has missed time with an injury, has not started a game since last month in a 3-1 loss against the Chicago Blackhawks.

The Canes have had their second-best start in franchise history through 12 games with a 9-3-0 record this season but have not looked to have fired on all gears. The good news from the last game is that Teuvo Teravainen got his first goal and that Martin Necas was able to return to play after an apparent head injury.

#### Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Stars
Record	8-3-0	5-3-3
Goals/Game	3.36	3.36
Goals Against/Game	2.73	2.64
Shots/Game	32.36	27.73
Face Off Win %	53.8%	49.8%
Power Play % (Rank)	24.3% (12th)	33.3% (5th)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	80.5% (16th)	78.3% (20th)
ES Corsi For %	56.56%	51.89%
ES PDO	99.87	101.21
PIM/Game	08:21	08:49

#### Goaltender #1

	James Reimer	Anton Khudobin
Record	6-1-0	3-3-1
Save %	.889	.902
GAA	3.11	2.75

#### Goaltender 1

#### Goaltender #2

Category	Alex Nedeljkovic	Jake Oettinger
Record	0-1-0	2-0-2
Save %	0.864	.919
GAA	3.1	2.19

#### Goaltender 2

#### Game Notes:

- The Hurricanes and Blue Jackets are meeting for the 44th time in their histories, with Carolina holding a 21-17-0-5 record all-time against Columbus, including a 10-10-0-2 road record.
- The Hurricanes are 15-8-5 in their last 28 games in the series.
- A pair of Blue Jackets come into the game with significant streaks. Cam Atkinson has a three-game goal streak and Seth Jones has an active five-game assist streak.
- The Carolina Hurricanes have the highest win percentage in overtime and shootout games since 2019 with .750 (15-5-0).
- Patrik Laine and Sebastian Aho rank first and second, respectively, in goals from Finnish born players since 2017. Laine leads Aho 108 to 100.



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# SportScan

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

1202804

Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes Get Playoff Experience With Dzingel Trade

February 14, 2021 by Dylan Rudolph

The Carolina Hurricanes announced Saturday that they are trading winger Ryan Dzingel to the Ottawa Senators in exchange for forwards Alex Galchenyuk and Cedric Paquette. The move comes after Dzingel started the 2020-21 season with just four points in 11 total games and saw just 13:12 of average ice time a game, his lowest since his rookie year in the 2015-16 season.

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour had praise for his now-former winger, but admitted this move was likely better for both parties.

"Dzingel was a good player for us," he said after Saturday's game against the Dallas Stars. "It just wasn't the right fit as far as finding him the right role... Nothing against him. I thought when we did have him in the right role, he was fine."

With the move, the Hurricanes pick up a couple of depth pieces that add good experience to the bottom six as well as clearing up \$675,000 in salary cap space.

Cedric Paquette

On the surface, the pickup of Paquette might be an unexciting one. The 27-year-old forward scored just one goal in his nine games with the Senators this season and currently sits at a career-low plus/minus with minus-8.

But a deeper dive will show that Paquette can add energy and solid two-way play to Carolina's depth lines, perfect for a Brind'Amour scheme that relies on the breakout and counterattack to put goals on the board. In his eight-year career, the forward has amassed 48 goals and 38 assists in 386 career NHL games with the Tampa Bay Lightning and Senators and brings some much-needed playoff experience to the roster.

Cedric Paquette #13, Tampa Bay Lightning

Cedric Paquette, former Tampa Bay Lightning (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

Paquette has played in 91 career playoff games, all with the Lightning, more than any other player on the Hurricanes except captain Jordan Staal (96 games). In those games, he brought a good spark in his fourth-line minutes to impact the game, especially in 2020 when he played in all 25 postseason games for the Lightning en route to winning the Stanley Cup.

The move may not wow anyone — and Paquette will likely not impress on the box score — but he will add a different dynamic and plenty of experience to a young team looking to make a push to win it all.

Alex Galchenyuk

Thought to be a better scorer than Paquette, Galchenyuk has recorded just a single goal and no assists in his eight games with the Senators. At just 26 years old, the forward looks past his peak as he has struggled to remain active and has bounced around the league a bit since he was traded from the Montreal Canadiens in 2018.

Alex Galchenyuk Pittsburgh Penguins

Alex Galchenyuk, former Pittsburgh Penguin (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

A former third-overall pick in 2012, he played his first six seasons with Montreal, recording 255 points (108 goals, 147 assists) before being traded to the Arizona Coyotes in the Phil Kessel trade. Since then, the 6-foot-1, 207-pound forward has not spent more than a full season at any one location, playing for the Pittsburgh Penguins, Minnesota Wild and Senators, all in the span of about two years.

The Hurricanes would have become his sixth team since coming into the league, but instead, he was placed on waivers on Sunday. If he remains unclaimed, he will likely be designated to Carolina's taxi squad.

What's Next

With the trade, Carolina loses two goals and two assists from Dzingel this year. The centerman signed as a free agent with the Hurricanes in July of 2019 and played in 75 total games, recording 33 points (10 goals, 23 assists). He now joins his former team, who drafted him in the seventh round in 2011. He'll hope to rekindle some of the magic he showed early in his career in order to break out of his journeyman status he has lingered in the past couple of seasons.

The trade as a whole seems low risk for both teams involved. The Hurricanes and the Senators exchange depth pieces looking to get more



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out of them than the other. For the Hurricanes, the free cap space that the move creates could also indicate another move on the horizon.

For now, Carolina looks to Monday, where they hope Paquette will be available to play against the Columbus Blue Jackets. The Hurricanes currently sit at third in the Central Division with a 9-3-0 record behind the Lightning and the Florida Panthers. Two tough opponents to overcome, but the fresh faces could help bring more energy to the squad as the season enters its second month of play.

The Hockey Writers LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202805 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes Trade Dzingel to Senators for Galchenyuk & Paquette

February 13, 2021 by Matthew Zator

The Carolina Hurricanes have traded forward Ryan Dzingel to the Ottawa Senators for Alex Galchenyuk and Cedric Paquette. This deal is the second major trade of the 2020-21 season after Patrik Laine was dealt to the Columbus Blue Jackets for Pierre-Luc Dubois on Jan 23. Like Dubois, Dzingel will have to quarantine for two weeks before officially joining the Senators.

Dzingel rejoins the Senators after brief stints with the Blue Jackets and Hurricanes. Overall he played 96 games over the past two campaigns after getting traded to the Blue Jackets at the deadline during the 2018-19 season. He signed a two-year contract with the Hurricanes at the beginning of the 2019-20 season and ended up having only 10 goals and 33 points in 75 games.

Dzingel will be an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season and carries a cap hit of \$3.375 million. The Senators will be hoping that he can regain the form he had during his first three seasons with the team, as he posted two straight 20-goal seasons and 62 goals and 126 points overall.

Dzingel was playing on the fourth-line in Carolina, so if any team can reignite his offence, it's the Senators. Granted, many of the players have changed in the Nation's Capital, but he still has the pedigree of a goal scorer with familiarity of the team and the city. He likely will be playing in the top-six and on the power play, which should afford him a few more opportunities than he was having with the Hurricanes.

Galchenyuk and Paquette on the Move Again

With this trade, Alex Galchenyuk will be joining his fifth team in three years after spending his first six seasons with the Montreal Canadiens, and he is only 26-years-old. Since posting 19 goals in 72 games with the Arizona Coyotes in 2018-19, he only has 17 goals in 126 games playing for the Coyotes, Senators, Pittsburgh Penguins, and Minnesota Wild. As time goes on, it's difficult to see him catching on with any team at this point. His stock has plummeted from a highly regarded first-round pick to a throw-in. If he doesn't turn it around soon, the KHL will probably be the next destination for the former 3rd overall pick.

Alex Galchenyuk Pittsburgh Penguins

Alex Galchenyuk is on the move again after stints with the Coyotes, Penguins, Wild and Senators (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

As for Paquette, he likely was the centerpiece of this trade. He will replace Dzingel on the fourth line and become a more effective bottom-six forward than he ever was. In seven seasons with the 2020 Stanley Cup champions Tampa Bay Lightning, he had 47 goals and 85 points while recording 956 hits and 278 blocked shots. He is a physical presence on the forecheck and an effective penalty killer, who should fit in perfectly with Rod Brind'Amour's system. If the Lightning didn't have to

shed salary in the offseason, he probably would still be a prominent piece of their team.

The Hockey Writers LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202806 Carolina Hurricanes

NHL Trade Grades: Blue Jackets dealing 7th-round pick to Canes could be a big win

By Corey Pronman, Dom Luszczyszyn and more Feb 14, 2021

Corey Pronman, Dom Luszczyszyn and Craig Custance grade the notable NHL trades of the season.

The trade:

The Columbus Blue Jackets acquired the rights to forward Gregory Hofmann.

The Carolina Hurricanes acquired a 2022 seventh-round pick.

Pronman: Prospect fans will remember Hofmann coming up periodically in the last 10 years, such as when he had a decent world juniors in 2012 or strong appearances at the world championships in more recent years. Now 28, Hofmann is considered a solid NHL prospect by NHL scouts after being great in the top Swiss league.

After being picked by the Hurricanes in the fourth round in 2011, his rights remained with Carolina all this time because Switzerland, like Russia, does not have a transfer agreement with the NHL. Sources around the league think the Hurricanes and Hofmann were unable to agree to terms in recent years so that is why he stayed in Switzerland; the reasons for that are unknown.

Hofmann is a skilled forward with great offensive instincts. He makes a lot of plays and does so with pace. Typically when you sign a 28-year-old European scorer, you're getting a guy with average size and skating, but Hofmann is different in that he's not undersized and he's a very good skater, above-average for the NHL, which is why I think his game will translate to the NHL. He's not great off the puck and won't be a penalty killer in the NHL, but I think the skating and skill combination is good enough to take a regular shift at even strength and be a useful contributor in the bottom six.

Hofmann is 28 and has never played at a club level higher than the Swiss league. He's not so talented that he's a sure thing, and Columbus has to get him to sign on the dotted line, but for a seventh-round pick, this is a nice gamble. Carolina recoups a later pick in the 2022 draft for a player. The Athletic's Aaron Portzline says Hofmann could join Columbus in the near future.

Columbus grade: B

Carolina grade: D

Jets and Blue Jackets swap stars Patrik Laine and Pierre-Luc Dubois

The trade:

The Winnipeg Jets receive center Pierre-Luc Dubois and a 2022 third-round pick.

The Columbus Blue Jackets receive winger Patrik Laine and center Jack Roslovic. The Jets retain 26 percent of Laine's salary.

Grading the Blue Jackets

CUSTANCE: In Patrik Laine, the Blue Jackets get the exact type of player they need. And have needed for a long time.



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"They didn't have the difference-maker skill guy — the Crosby, the Kane," said an NHL executive on Saturday after the deal. "When they had (Artemi) Panarin, he drove the whole offense. They needed that dynamic."

The Blue Jackets get an edge here because of the upside this trade provides, even in giving up one of the hardest things in hockey to get, a top-line center. Laine has a rare skillset with an incredible shot and incredible release, and we still haven't seen his ceiling in terms of goal-scoring. Jack Roslovic is probably a third-line forward. But maybe not.

"I watched Roslovic when he played for Manitoba and he was a better player than (Kyle) Connor in the American Hockey League," said an NHL talent evaluator. "The guy is really skilled, can make plays. The Blue Jackets need a center. He's going to get every opportunity in the world to go in there and shine."

Said a scout of Roslovic: "I would project him as a third-line center, if I'm betting on it."

There are still questions that need to be answered for this trade to be a win for the Blue Jackets. Most notably, what does Laine's next contract look like? Getting star players to stay in the market has been a problem for the Blue Jackets, but a league source suggested that GM Jarmo Kekalainen doesn't make this trade if he wasn't absolutely confident he can lock in Laine long-term.

The other question is pretty simple: Who is going to get him the puck? As much as this trade fills a hole for Columbus, it creates one too.

"I don't know how this will work out for Columbus," said another executive. "Does Columbus have a (Mark) Scheifele for (Laine) to play with? This may be a challenge for them."

Grade: A-

LUSZCZYNSZYN: Laine is an extremely intriguing player and it'll be very interesting to see how he fits with the Blue Jackets — and what version of him the team gets. The one from the last couple of seasons isn't enough and it's why Winnipeg probably wins the trade for now as Laine's star has fallen. That Laine is worth around 1.7 wins, can put up points but not do much else, while being an extreme liability on defense. Being one of the league's worst defensive players takes a lot away from his offensive value. Laine's contract is also up after this season and he has one less year of team control, too. That plays a role in the trade evaluation.

Columbus was in an untenable situation with Dubois, and considering those circumstances, it's difficult to hate the return here even if Laine isn't the player he was in his first two seasons. The hope is that he can get back to that level and that's not difficult to imagine in a new situation, even if it is under Columbus coach John Tortorella.

The Blue Jackets desperately need a pure goal-scorer and that's where things get interesting with Laine. He'll surely be a very strong asset on the power play, but is he a guy who can create goals on his own or does he need help at five-on-five? His weak play-driving numbers suggest he needs help and while he won't have nearly as much in Columbus, I can see him fitting well next to Max Domi, one of the game's most underrated passers. That duo will need some serious defensive help though.

I don't rate Roslovic very highly with his value being just barely above the third-round pick going the other way, but he's an interesting flier given his pedigree. He needs to prove more at five-on-five, but maybe just needs to play with better players. Being stuck in Winnipeg's bottom-six likely hasn't helped showcase his ability, though I'm not sure that's going to change in Columbus.

Grade: B

PRONMAN: Laine is a divisive figure in the scouting community. Scouts don't like his compete level, they don't like his skating, describing both as poor, and typically wingers who play like that aren't viewed as elite NHL assets. On the other hand, some scouts love him because he is 6-foot-4, he has elite skill and he has one of the best shots you will ever see.

While known as a goal-scorer, he has high hockey IQ and is a great passer. Laine has put up massive numbers over his career at various levels.

According to Hockey Reference, the most NHL points by a player through their age-21 season since 1990 have been:

Sidney Crosby: 397

Steven Stamkos: 329

Jaromir Jagr: 319

Connor McDavid: 256

Mats Sundin: 249

Patrik Laine: 247

Eric Lindros: 242

Patrick Kane: 230

Hockey Reference uses a January cutoff so Connor McDavid lost his final season in the data. Regardless, Laine is in good company.

I do get the concerns on Laine. He will have stretches where he causes some headaches, and when the game gets faster and harder, it's reasonable to wonder if he can be an impact player at that level, although he does have 16 points in 24 NHL playoff games.

With that said, he is a game-breaking offensive player, and he is a player I think will regularly be among the top goal and point scorers in the NHL. When I recently evaluated the best U23 players in the league, I assessed Laine as the No. 5 player, someone who was on the bubble between one of the best players in the league and an all-star. I stand by that assessment despite his warts. I think Columbus gets the best player in this deal in Laine.

Roslovic is also worth noting. He is an excellent skater with some skill. He's not close to the caliber of the other two players moved in this deal, but he could be an effective middle-six forward in the NHL.

Grade: B+

Grading the Jets

CUSTANCE: Ignoring the iso-cam that featured Dubois maling in a recent shift, we're only a few months removed from the 22-year-old center blowing everybody away with his performance in the bubble. On a championship team, he's maybe a No. 2 center. And with Mark Scheifele in Winnipeg, he gets to play that role.

In our recent Player Tiers package, he was in the Top 100. Laine was not. People in the game really like Dubois, even if his reputation might have taken a slight hit in the recent weeks. In debating Dubois versus other great players for that piece, one executive made this conclusion: "I'm taking Dubois' next five years over (Steven) Stamkos'."

Successful teams build down the middle and one scout pointed out that the Jets now have the center depth to compete with other teams in the Canadian division.

"In that Canadian group, there were teams better down the middle than them," said the scout. "Now, there are not."

Dubois fills a need but the Jets have to be completely confident they're getting the player who helped upset the Maple Leafs and not the player we've seen this season.

"He's the total package," said a scout of Dubois. "His game is driven off hockey sense, power in tight areas, making quick plays. ... He's really good in traffic. If his legs aren't moving and he's trying to play stationary, he can look how it looked the other night."

Grade: B+



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LUSZCZYNSKY: Based on my Twitter mentions from this morning, it's apparently a little spicy to say the Jets got the best player in the deal in Dubois. Laine is obviously the flashier player, a guy who can fill the net with pucks. But Dubois is a much more complete player at a more valuable position. There's a reason Dubois made our top 100 player tiers and Laine didn't.

Dubois can drive play well at both ends of the ice, is a terrific playmaker and an excellent puck-carrier. The Blue Jackets' expected goal differential has been 0.2 per 60 better with Dubois on the ice since the 2018-19, a solid mark for a player with strong two-way upside. There's a reason his best comp is Aleksander Barkov, and it wouldn't be a shock at all to see Dubois grow into one of the league's best centers. By GSV, Dubois is currently projected to be worth about 2.2 wins, assuming he gets the bigger role he's looking for.

It's also worth noting that at five-on-five Dubois has actually had better production over the last two seasons, scoring 0.97 goals-per-60 and 2.07 points-per-60 to Laine's 0.8 and 1.68 respectively. Laine did have the edge last season, but there's also a big difference in producing offense in Winnipeg and Columbus considering the offensive supporting casts on each team. Dubois should have much more help in Winnipeg, which should increase his point totals.

I am a bit surprised the Blue Jackets were the ones who had to add the pick (well, not really, but I don't think they should've), though a third isn't much with a projected value of 0.7 wins over seven years. Either way, it's a nice sweetener for the Jets who were arguably already getting the top player.

Grade: A-

PRONMAN: The first thing any scout I talk to about Dubois will mention is his playoff run from last summer where he was a true standout for Columbus. Hockey is a unique sport in that the rules implicitly change from the regular season to the playoffs. Players who are viewed as being able to play a harder style are viewed as more valuable in the postseason. Dubois, who is a 6-foot-2 center and competes at a high level with great skill and hockey sense, is viewed as a premium asset in the highest leverage environments.

Do I necessarily agree with that sentiment? I think it's very credible, but I have my hesitations. I don't think you want to overreact too much to a 10-game run. I don't view Dubois' skating as a strong point or think his skill level is elite, so you have to balance all that information. I also think it's fair to criticize a player known for his compete and strong character being involved in the drama of recent weeks.

After digging into Dubois the last week and talking to a bunch of sources, I probably was a little too harsh in my most recent evaluation of him in my U23 ranking. I categorized him in the "bubble of NHL all-star and top of lineup player," when he should have been in the NHL all-star category. I've moved him up after being swayed by what he did in the postseason and upgrading his puck skills grade.

I would still prefer Laine just because I see some exceptional elements in his game that I don't in Dubois, but I think it's reasonable to prefer one over the other given the latter is more well-rounded and plays a more premium position.

I view Dubois as a star No. 1 center in the NHL. Playing with Scheifele will give the Jets one of the best 1-2 punches down the middle in the league.

Grade: B-

The Athletic LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202815

Columbus Blue Jackets

Takeaways: Close doesn't cut it in Blue Jackets' mistake-fueled overtime loss

Brian Hedger

CHICAGO – They were close to finishing it.

Despite being forced to defend late in the third period, the Blue Jackets were headed toward their third straight victory Saturday night at United Center ... until they weren't. They had a 2-1 lead against the Chicago Blackhawks, were in control of their own fate and then it all flipped upside down in the waning moments.

Carl Soderberg tied it 2-2 with 3:45 left in regulation, aided by a turnover, and that forced an overtime that lasted just 35 seconds thanks to another turnover Alex DeBrincat's winning goal off of it – handing the Blue Jackets a 3-2 loss to process.

Here are five takeaways:

Turnovers costly

Stretches of this game looked like the Blue Jackets of old.

They made life difficult for the Blackhawks, taking away shooting lanes and breaking up plays, but there were times they reverted to the Blue Jackets they've been most of this season. That was especially true on two key turnovers that resulted in the final two goals.

The first, which Chicago forward Phillip Kurashev sparked by swatting the puck off Zach Werenski's stick in the defensive zone, led directly to Soderberg's goal that tied it. The second one was an intercepted pass in OT by DeBrincat, who quickly dropped the puck to Patrick Kane and headed for the net – ending the game off a return feed by tapping the puck out of mid-air.

"We weren't making plays out of our zone, just kind of flipping it (out), and we got away from our style a little bit – and they capitalized on those opportunities," said Cam Atkinson, who had a goal and assist. "It's nice we got a snipe, but I think we should've come away with two points."

Laine's snipe

Laine's goal was a jarring reminder of his tantalizing talent, an eye-catching shot at live speed that gained a new level of awe on video replays.

After getting the puck from Atkinson, Laine entered the Chicago zone, picked out a target and ripped a wrist shot into the far corner – after pulling the puck inward to make sure it wasn't contested by Blackhawks defenseman Nicolas Beaudin. It missed the rookie's right leg by inches, eluded goalie Kevin Lankinen's blocker and clanked off the metal into the net for his sixth goal of the season and fourth in six games as a Blue Jacket.

"That's how I'm getting my paychecks, to do that, so it's just all natural," Laine said. "I'm not thinking about it. I'm just shooting it. And I know I'm good at it, so I don't need to think about it."

Laine earns his stripes

Add "physicality" to the list of things that Laine's breathtaking shot overshadows.

Similar to his hands, vision and passing skills, Laine's willingness to use his 6 foot 5, 206 pound frame as a battering ram was evident during an active first period. Along with his goal, Laine delivered two big hits along the far boards in the neutral zone, right near the penalty boxes, and also got into his first NHL fight.

That happened after Blackhawks forward Brandon Hagel rocked Blue Jackets center Jack Roslovic with a hit that probably should've been penalized. Laine smashed Hagel into the boards, got into his grill and they dropped their gloves. Laine landed several blows early before Hagel landed two stiff right hands to end the fight.



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"I just liked his reaction," Tortorella said. "He went to the aid of his teammate. I don't know why he gets a penalty on the hit, but Jack gets hit pretty well. Patty comes in, yeah, everybody liked that. We don't want him fighting all the time here, but he did it for the right reasons and that's really good for the club."

### Trouble in OT

Earning the second point in 3-on-3 overtimes used to be a Blue Jackets specialty, particularly in the two seasons they had Artemi Panarin and goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

Columbus dropped to 1-4 beyond regulation with this loss, including 0-3 in OT games. Last year, they went 7-15 overall and 7-11 in OT, which makes for combined records the past two seasons of 8-19 overall and 7-14 in OT. The Blue Jackets went 25-11 beyond regulation in two seasons with Panarin and Bobrovsky, including 19-7 in OT.

What's the biggest key to improving without them?

"I think just winning a draw," Atkinson said. "I think that's the most important thing. You win the (opening) draw, you have full control and you're not on your heels. It's plain and simple. When you win the draw, a lot of good things happen and you get a lot of good opportunities."

### Korpisalo rebounds

Joonas Korpisalo started his sixth straight game and rebounded from allowing five goals in the Jackets' wild 6-5 victory against the Blackhawks on Thursday.

Korpisalo didn't have much chance to stop most of those goals in a game he described as a "gong show," but the Blue Jackets' netminder made 28 saves Saturday and helped them kill two Chicago power plays – no small accomplishment considering the Blackhawks' sizzling 36.2% success rate before the game.

Elvis Merzlikins handled the backup role again, after returning from an upper-body injury, so it was noteworthy that Korpisalo got the nod. It would've meant a longer time to stew about Thursday's game if he hadn't, but that wasn't one of his concerns.

"I've been there so many times, it doesn't matter anymore," Korpisalo said. "I can handle those."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 02.15.2021

**1202816** Columbus Blue Jackets

Lost in transition: Blackhawks make Blue Jackets pay in OT for pair of late turnovers

Brian Hedger

CHICAGO – This one wasn't a circus.

Goals weren't traded like GameStop stocks, there wasn't an overload of blown coverages and players weren't racking up points in bunches – unlike the 11-goal scoring festival two nights earlier that Blue Jackets goalie Joonas Korpisalo now refers to as a "gong show."

No, this one was simply a hard-fought hockey game, which the Blue Jackets nearly turned into their third straight win before a couple of ill-timed turnovers spoiled it, lifting the Chicago Blackhawks to a 3-2 overtime victory on Saturday night at United Center.

"It's frustrating, for sure," said Cam Atkinson, who had two points and put the Blue Jackets up 2-1 late in the second period with his fifth goal of the season. "You could tell they were starting to take over the last 10 minutes, so I'm not sure why we kind of backed off. We weren't making

plays out of our zone, just kind of flipping it (out) and we got away from our style a little bit – and they capitalized on those opportunities."

Carl Soderberg was the first recipient of a costly turnover late in the third, tying the game 2-2 with 3:45 left in regulation after teammate Philipp Kurashev swatted the puck off the stick of Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski.

That forced a quick 3-on-3 overtime period the Blackhawks ended on the first shift.

After watching Nick Foligno knock the puck away from star left wing Patrick Kane high in the Columbus zone following the opening face-off of OT, Chicago's Alex DeBrincat intercepted a pass the Blue Jackets' captain intended for Patrik Laine.

Had it gotten to Laine cleanly, the Blue Jackets would've had a 3-on-2 rush up the ice with Kane trapped behind the play. Instead, DeBrincat picked it off, carried back over the blue line, dropped it to Kane and then headed straight for the net completely uncovered for a return feed.

Kane feathered it perfectly between Seth Jones and Foligno, then watched as DeBrincat's impressive hands took over. The Blackhawks forward chopped at the puck after it hit the ice, lofting it into the air in front of him, and he scored by just getting his stick on it in mid-air.

"It was a great pass, first of all," said Korpisalo, who made 28 saves. "Kane makes a great pass between two players to DeBrincat, who just bats it out of (the) air. It's really hard (to stop) that."

The Blackhawks' first goal in regulation was scored by Nicolas Beaudin to tie it 1-1 in the second period, scoring off a rebound of Kane's shot. Kevin Lankinen started in net for Chicago and made 29 saves for the win. Patrik Laine and Atkinson scored for the Blue Jackets (7-5-4), who will head off to Raleigh, N.C. next to conclude a three-game road trip Monday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

"It seemed like we were getting away from our style of play (in the final 10 minutes of the third), like we were on our heels instead of our toes trying to make plays through the middle," Atkinson said. "We just kind of went up the boards and off the glass and out, and gave them more possession – where in the first two periods we controlled the play and broke out of our end clean. I think we got away from that for whatever reason."

The first two periods were smoother for Columbus, despite attempting less shots and not generating as many scoring chances. Laine scored in the first to put the Blue Jackets up 1-0 at 6:39 on his sixth goal of the season.

Beaudin tied it 1-1 at 3:12 of the second, scoring for the Blackhawks off Kane's rebound, but the Jackets managed to surge back in front on Atkinson's goal – and second point of the game – to lead 2-1 at the second intermission.

Standing in the low slot, Atkinson got his stick on a shot by Zach Werenski with 5:13 left and deflected the puck between Lankinen's pads for his fifth goal of the season and second in as many games.

Atkinson also assisted on Laine's goal, which was a continuation of a hot streak for the veteran right wing that included a four-point game (one goal, three assists) here Thursday.

It helps to have a guy like Laine as a linemate.

After getting him the puck with a short pass in the neutral zone, Atkinson watched his towering teammate pull off a dazzling goal that perfectly showcases his immense talent for shooting a hockey puck.

After carrying over the Chicago blue line, Laine skated into the right circle, pulled up just enough to fire off a wrist shot that Beaudin was a fraction of a second too late to contest and wired the puck into the top left corner of the net.

It wasn't Laine's only highlight of the period.



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He also delivered two big hits against Blackhawks forwards Reese Johnson and Brandon Hagel after each landed crunching blows against Blue Jackets forwards Boone Jenner and Jack Roslovic. Hagel's hit on Roslovic immediately angered Laine, who quickly smashed Hagel into the boards and then fought him.

"The guy hit 'Rosy,' tried to get the team fired up and we just drop our gloves and go at it," said Laine, who logged his first NHL fight. "There's not much else to say on that one."

Both were given the standard five minutes for fighting, but Laine was assessed an interference penalty that put the Blackhawks on the power play. The Blue Jackets didn't care, clacking their sticks on the boards to show their approval and killing off the penalty to preserve the 1-0 lead.

"He went to the aid of his teammate," Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella said. "I don't know why he gets a penalty on the hit, but Jack gets hit pretty well. We don't want him fightin' all the time here, but he did it for the right reasons and that's really good for the club."

It also happened less than a week after Laine was benched almost half a game for an interaction with an assistant coach during the Jackets' 3-2 victory Monday against the Carolina Hurricanes. Laine's first period merely backed up what he and Tortorella said Wednesday after practice – that they've all moved on from the incident.

The Jackets would've enjoyed Laine's actions even more if they'd won, but instead felt another sting in overtime – falling to 0-3 in games decided in the 3-on-3 format.

"Tonight, I just don't think it should've gone to overtime," Tortorella said. "We were playing well enough to finish that game and win that game 2-1, but we've just got to get better with the 3-on-3, trying to find some pairs that will work together along with one of our (defensemen). We just haven't found our way."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202817 Columbus Blue Jackets

Zach Werenski returns to Blue Jackets' lineup after studying games from a new perch

Brian Hedger

CHICAGO – The length of time he was out of the Blue Jackets' lineup was long enough for Zach Werenski to gain a new perspective.

Prior to returning from a lower-body injury Saturday against the Chicago Blackhawks, Werenski watched the team's previous three games from high above the ice in areas designated for players who are scratched or injured.

It was an eye-opening experience.

"When you watch from above, the game looks so easy," said Werenski, who was injured late in the Blue Jackets' 4-3 victory against the Dallas Stars on Feb. 4 at Nationwide Arena. "It's totally different when you're out there on the ice, and for me to watch three games from above, I think I've learned a lot. I'm excited to play now, just from seeing what the game looks like from up there."

The reason it looks easy from that vantage point is related to perception, specifically as it pertains to the pace the game is played. The farther away you step back, the slower it looks. The closer you get to the ice, the more hurried and blurred it feels.

Werenski, who'd struggled defensively before his injury, plans to meld the two perspectives into his path back to the high level of play he's reached for most of his five NHL seasons.

"I've just tried to pick up on things I can try to take with me and hopefully kind of jump-start my game this year," said Werenski, who was activated from injured reserve Saturday. "It sucks being injured, but I tried to take some positives out of it. I was watching from above, trying to learn from the games."

As for the injury, Werenski didn't assign a percentage number to the level of his recovery. He described the injury as "minor" and a "fluke thing" that happened against the Stars.

"I'm ready to go, ready to play," said Werenski, who practiced Friday with the team for the first time since the injury. "I don't think anything is going to hold me back. Otherwise, I wouldn't be playing. So, I feel good to play."

Going into the game, Werenski was expected to play in his usual spot alongside Seth Jones on the top defense pairing.

Peeke plays again

After playing a solid game Thursday to end 11-plus months between game action, defenseman Andrew Peeke stayed in the lineup Saturday.

The only expected change for the 22-year-old was his defense partner, which switched from Michael Del Zotto in the game to Vladislav Gavrikov during practice Friday. Del Zotto skated with David Savard in the practice, forming a new second pairing, while Gavrikov and Peeke paired up as the third unit.

Peeke's last action prior to the Jackets' 6-5 win against the Blackhawks was Mar. 8 in Vancouver, which turned out to be the team's regular-season finale.

"All players, you're always worried about their development, but that defensive position – with the amount of things that you have to process, as far as your reads and stuff like that – you only can do that in game situations," coach John Tortorella said. "So, we're really concerned about that and I'm glad (Peeke) handled himself the right way."

The Blue Jackets have nine defensemen, which is two more than most teams typically carry on their NHL roster. Harrington, Dean Kukan and Gabriel Carlsson are the three currently outside the playing group – with Carlsson the only one yet to play.

Crunch time

Del Zotto is an offensive-minded defenseman, so his physicality isn't mentioned a lot. In fact, critics never bring it up while pointing out his defensive liabilities in past years.

Del Zotto, meanwhile, keeps racking up hits.

The 30-year-old defenseman had 33 of them going into the game Saturday, which was third on the Blue Jackets in that category and trailed only Savard (37) and captain Nick Foligno (35).

"I've always had the physical side to my game, even earlier in my career," said Del Zotto, who is playing his 12th season and delivered 1,538 hits in 672 games. "I have that physical edge to me, but it all depends on the game. Sometimes, if you have the puck more, you're not going to be as physical. Sometimes, if you're chasing it, you may get a few good opportunities for some good licks. It just depends on the game."

Cannon Fodder

Joonas Korpisalo was tabbed to make his sixth straight start in net Saturday. Elvis Merzlikins, who was activated from IR Thursday, handled the backup role for the second straight game. ... Rookie goalie Matiss Kivlenieks (lower body) was placed on IR, which opened a roster spot for Werenski. ... The Cleveland Monsters were scheduled to play the Rochester Americans on Saturday after losing 7-3 to Rochester on Friday in their season opener. Nathan Gerbe, Zac Dalpe and Dillon Simpson scored the Monster's goals.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1202818

Columbus Blue Jackets

Sunday gathering: Roslovic's surprise, Peeke's layoff, and OT without Panarin

By Aaron Portzline Feb 14, 2021

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows? gathered throughout the week that was for the Blue Jackets:

Item #1: Roslovic's impact

When the Blue Jackets acquired Jack Roslovic three weeks ago, GM Jarmo Kekäläinen made it clear he viewed him as a top-six center.

Plenty of NHL types saw him as a winger, including his former club, Winnipeg. Many scouts leaned more toward Roslovic being a third-line center. But Kekäläinen was resolute: He's a top-six center.

"So far, with a small sample size," Kekäläinen said on Saturday, "he's played like one."

Roslovic has been a revelation so far with the Blue Jackets. He has 4-5-9 in nine games, already the club's third-leading point producer.

But beyond the points is the way that Roslovic has played. He holds onto the puck to make plays, he skates through and around checks and he plays with the puck at a speed that almost nobody else on the roster can replicate.

Recall the way Roslovic split two defenders for the game-winner last Sunday versus Carolina. And his snap one-timer from the "bumper" spot on the Blue Jackets power play in Thursday's 6-5 win in Chicago.

This thought process didn't find much purchase with coach John Tortorella, but Roslovic's style of play — his willingness and his ability to be singularly offensively dangerous — seems to have sent a jolt of confidence through the lineup.

Think about how the Blue Jackets were taught to play last season, how being defensively aware — "Third guy high!" — was tantamount. In the first three weeks of the season, it sure felt as if Tortorella's encouragement to be more offensively creative was either a muddled message or was too difficult an adaptation for players to make on their own.

And then the trade happened, adding two offensively gifted players who hadn't been inculcated in such a conservative offensive style.

Roslovic joined the Blue Jackets lineup on Jan. 28 against Florida. Patrik Laine debuted on Feb. 2, but let's draw a line just before Roslovic's first game.

On Jan. 27, the Blue Jackets were averaging 2.57 goals per game, 23rd in the NHL. The power play was hitting at 5.3 percent, 30th.

Since Jan. 28, the Blue Jackets are averaging 3.11 goals per game, 11th in the NHL. The power play, at 26.1 percent, also is 11th.

"I guess you could say it's rubbing off on everybody," Kekäläinen said. "Players are always looking at their teammates, seeing what they're doing, and the one thing we haven't had a lot of so far is offensive confidence."

Kekäläinen knew of Roslovic's speed and skills. But an up-close view has shown him another aspect of Roslovic's game that he wasn't sure existed.

"The one thing that's really impressed me is that he's really strong on the puck," Kekäläinen said. "He doesn't look like a real big guy (6-1, 190), but

he's hard to knock off the puck. He can get through people. He can hold onto the puck in the corners when we're cycling.

"I knew he was fast, but he may be even a little faster than I thought. But his ability to hold on to pucks in traffic, stay on his feet and protect the puck, has been something I've been very impressed with so far."

This is the opportunity Roslovic was essentially begging for in Winnipeg. He and agent Claude Lemieux requested a trade away from the Jets after last season, and he remained unsigned as a restricted free agent until shortly after the move to Columbus.

He can be a man of few words with the media. But Blue Jackets players in the room tell a different story.

"I don't think he's stopped talking since he's been here," defenseman Michael Del Zotto said. "The kid loves to talk. I put this on Instagram the other day: He's like the little brother I've never had. We joke back and forth and tease each other. He provides energy at all times.

"Sometimes you have to tell him to stop talking. I'm trying to eat my food, and this guy's just in my ear all day. Great kid. Works his tail off. Lots of skill. Playing with swagger right now, and he's fun to watch."

Item #2: Peeke condition

There were several superlative performances last week for the Blue Jackets. Cam Atkinson's four-point night. Laine's ridiculous goal and the first fight of his career. Roslovic's defense-splitting game-winner.

But, quietly, one of the most impressive showings was by defenseman Andrew Peeke, who drew back into the lineup on Thursday for the first time in 340 days.

Peeke last played in the NHL on March 8, 2020, just four days before the Blue Jackets' regular season came to a screeching halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Blue Jackets were healthy when the 2019-20 season resumed inside the bubble in Toronto, so Peeke was a depth defenseman who never cracked the lineup.

Early this season, Peeke was again on the outside looking in when Michael Del Zotto and Dean Kukan grabbed the final lineup spots created by the offseason trades of Ryan Murray and Markus Nutivaara.

So Peeke was parked. The AHL, which didn't begin play until early February, wasn't an option, either.

It's not ideal for any player to go more than 11 months between games, but that's especially true for a 22-year-old defenseman.

"It's not the conditioning that worries us," Kekäläinen said. "Those guys skate every day and they do drills, battle drills, they do plenty extra. So they're in shape, there's no question about that.

"But adjusting to the NHL speed and getting the feel for it and getting your timing, that's the hardest part."

Peeke played both games in Chicago. You never would have guessed he'd gone so long between competitive games.

He played 17:40 with an assist and a plus-2 rating in his debut on Thursday. On Saturday, he played 16:31 with a minus-1 rating and a shot on goal. Most notably, he jumped into passing lanes and made aggressive reads in the neutral zone.

"It looks like he's taken a step physically," Kekäläinen said. "He's moving well. He's decisive. He's confident. Those are things we're looking for.

"He made simple enough plays to get started after a long pause, and I'm sure that's something the coaching staff wanted from him to get his feet wet."

Peeke is 6-foot-3, 194 pounds. He's a right shot. It's easy to look into the future and see him as a potential top-four replacement for David Savard, should Savard depart this summer as an unrestricted free agent.



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In fact, Peeke's play the last two games may have already prompted a roster move.

On Sunday, the Blue Jackets placed defenseman Gabriel Carlsson —the No. 29 overall pick in 2015 — on waivers. He'll go to AHL Cleveland if he clears at noon on Monday, making it clear that Peeke has climbed past him on the depth chart.

Item #3: Bread crumbs

Of all the departures from Columbus in recent seasons, the one that hurts the most is still Artemi Panarin. The point of this nugget is not to rip the scab off that wound, just to provide some perspective.

In Panarin's two seasons with the Blue Jackets, they were an astounding 17-6 in games that ended in overtime, by far the highest winning percentage in the league. Only Pittsburgh (17) won as many OT games in those two seasons.

Since Panarin left, the Jackets are just 8-14 when games are settled in OT, including 0-3 this season, including Saturday's loss to Chicago after only 35 seconds. Those 14 losses are more than any other team. Anaheim is second with 10.

Panarin had five OT game-winners with the Blue Jackets, but his greatest gift as a player was making everybody around him better by drawing so much attention when he had the puck. Seth Jones had four OT winners in those two seasons.

Overtime possession seemed so easy for Columbus, almost to the point of being unfair.

Tortorella may have to reconsider who he sends out for overtime after Sunday's loss in Chicago. He started with Foligno, Laine and Jones, and the game was over before another trio could take the ice.

Laine always has the other team's attention. But the Blue Jackets need somebody who can win a faceoff, and that has been a challenge.

Boone Jenner has won 55.2 percent of his draws, but his speed makes him a liability in three-on-three play. Otherwise, Blue Jackets centers have struggled on the dot: Roslovic (32.4 percent), Alexandre Texier (36.6) and now Kevin Stenlund (40).

Max Domi is at 49.6 percent on faceoffs, but he has struggled extensively in other areas of the game and has been moved to left wing.

It'll be interesting to see what Tortorella cooks up when the Blue Jackets next face OT. Until then, the best advice may be to get it settled in regulation.

The week ahead

Monday: at Carolina, 7 p.m.

Thursday: vs. Nashville, 7 p.m.

Saturday: vs. Nashville, 7 p.m.

Numerology

59: When Chicago's Ian Mitchell and Nicolas Beaudin scored in Thursday's 6-5 thriller in United Center, they became the 58th and 59th players to score the first goal of their careers against the Blue Jackets, according to Hockey Reference.

That sounds like a lot of goals, even over 20 seasons, but it actually puts Columbus toward the bottom of the pack. Ottawa and New Jersey have each allowed 79 "first goals" during those same 20 seasons.

Some nuggets within the numbers:

- One current NHL coach scored his first goal vs. Columbus: Ottawa bench boss D.J. Smith, while playing for Colorado on Jan. 23, 2003. It was the only goal of his career.

- One current Blue Jackets player scored his first goal against the Blue Jackets: Gustav Nyquist got it started on March 26, 2012, while playing for Detroit. He'd sign with Columbus as a free agent seven years later.

- Four former Blue Jackets players (or prospects) have scored their first goal against the Blue Jackets: Jeremy Reich, on Dec. 15, 2007, for Boston; Greg Mauldin, on Nov. 12, 2010, for Colorado; Ian Cole, on March 9, 2011, for St. Louis; and Tyler Motte, on Oct. 21, 2016, for Chicago.

- Best three players to have scored their first versus Columbus: Alex Ovechkin on Oct. 5, 2005, for Washington; Taylor Hall on Oct. 28, 2010, for Edmonton; and Gabriel Landeskog on Oct. 12, 2011, for Colorado.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202828 Florida Panthers

Florida Panthers get mixed results over homestand. Where things stand after 12 games

BY JORDAN MCPHERSON

FEBRUARY 14, 2021 11:57 AM

They played six games over 10 days at their home arena, hoping to continue to find their identity and continue their hot start to the season along the way.

The Florida Panthers stumbled at times during the half-dozen games at the BB&T Center and put together a mixed bag of results.

The Panthers went 3-2-1 over the homestand, picking up seven out of a possible 12 points, and are now 8-2-2 on the season.

It ended with a whimper with a 6-1 loss to the defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning two days after Florida beat Tampa Bay 5-2.

"They were a hungrier team," Panthers coach Joel Quenneville said Saturday of the Lightning. "I don't think they've had one of those games like the first [on Thursday] where they got out-played. ... They came back with a different appetite."

They were hoping for more than a split at home — 1-0-1 against the Nashville Predators, 1-1-0 against both the Detroit Red Wings and the Lightning — but they are still in decent position near the top of the Central Division as their schedule begins to pick up in difficulty.

PICKING UP POINTS, HOWEVER POSSIBLE

The result may not always be pretty, but the Panthers have found ways to consistently pick up points.

Their 18 points entering Sunday put them a four-way tie for second place in the Central Division with the Carolina Hurricanes, Columbus Blue Jackets and Chicago Blackhawks. However, the Panthers are one of just six NHL teams that has picked up at least 75 percent of its possible points so far this season. The Central is the only division with multiple teams that fit this mark (Tampa Bay is at 80.8 percent; Florida and Carolina are at 75 percent).

The reason for this: 17 of 56 games between Central Division teams entering Sunday — 30.4 percent — have gone to overtime or shootouts, which guarantees each team at least one point in the standings.

Teams are only playing inside their division during the 56-game regular season, with the top four teams in each of the four divisions advancing to the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Every game that doesn't end in regulation only tightens the divisional race.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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### WHAT TO MAKE OF SERGEI BOBROVSKY

We'll start this with a caveat: Not all goals allowed are created equal, just like not all saves are created equal.

But there comes a point where results begin to even out and the picture becomes a little clearer about a team's goaltending situation.

Which brings us to Sergei Bobrovsky.

5-1-1 record aside, the base numbers haven't been pretty through his first seven starts. His 3.33 goals against average is 37th out of 48 goaltenders with at least five starts this season. His .884 save percentage is 41st out of 48 goaltenders.

He had two games this homestand where he looked incredible, stopping 50 of 53 combined shots in wins over the Red Wings and Lightning. And then he had two where nothing was working — six-goal onslaughts by the Predators on Feb. 4 to start the homestand (including two in the final two-plus minutes of regulation to force overtime) and Lightning on Saturday to end it.

But there's more to those numbers.

According to the advanced statistics website Natural Stat Trick:

- Eleven of the 24 goals Bobrovsky has given up have been classified as "High Danger" scoring chances.
- Seven of his 24 goals (and only two of the "High Danger" goals) have come on an opponent's power play.
- His .910 save percentage when both teams are at full strength is 28th out of 39 goaltenders with at least 240 minutes of ice time in 5 on 5 situations.

In summary: There's still a lot left to be desired from Bobrovsky in the second year of his seven-year, \$70 million deal.

### THE PENALTY KILL NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The Panthers' power play has been one of the best in the NHL. Their scoring goals 32.4 percent of the time when they have an extra attacker, which is the fifth-best mark in the NHL.

Their penalty kill? It's been spotty at best. And it struggled during the home stand. Florida gave up five power play goals on 14 attempts over the six games, killing off penalties at just a 64.3-percent efficiency. For the season, Florida has just a 74.3 percent penalty-kill rate, which ranks 25th out of 31 NHL teams.

### ON THE ROAD AGAIN

The Panthers play their next four games on the road. They face the Lightning for a third consecutive game on Monday, this time at Tampa's Amalie Arena. After that, it's a Wednesday game against the Hurricanes and a back-to-back against the Detroit Red Wings on Friday and Saturday.

Miami Herald LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202807 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks have found stellar first line in Patrick Kane with Alex DeBrincat, Pius Suter

By Ben Pope Feb 14, 2021, 4:16pm CST

Take out the Oilers' duo of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, and Blackhawks wing Patrick Kane would be the NHL's leading scorer.

Despite passing his 32nd birthday and missing longtime partner-in-offense Jonathan Toews, Kane is enjoying yet another terrific season in 2021.

And that's largely because he's developing strong connections with wing Alex DeBrincat and center Pius Suter.

The Hawks used that combination occasionally through the first month of the season, especially on the power play, but Philipp Kurashev and Mattias Janmark also spent time next to Kane.

Starting Thursday against the Blue Jackets, however, coach Jeremy Colliton united DeBrincat, Suter and Kane permanently. He was rewarded instantly.

"They always have chemistry," Colliton said Saturday. "They know how to find each other. Suter's been a really nice fit with them. Before we lost [DeBrincat] there for a week or so, they had a couple of excellent games against Detroit. Felt like it'd be something we could go back to."

"Suter's just getting better and starting to familiarize himself with the NHL game," Kane said Thursday. "He wins pucks back. He's driving the net really well and creating space for his linemates. DeBrincat's been great pretty much all year. I still think there's more there."

Kane's 22 points (seven goals, team-high 15 assists) in 16 games put him on the highest points-per-game pace of his 14-year career. Although he's unlikely to keep this up through May, he nonetheless is proving he remains among the elite playmakers in hockey. Entering action Sunday, he was the highest scorer on any U.S. team by four points.

DeBrincat boasts a team-high eight goals and eight assists for 16 points in only 12 games. After his snakebitten 2019-20 season, in which his shooting percentage fell to 8.7%, he's now back above 18%, just like he was in 2018-19. His defense has improved greatly since then, too.

Suter, meanwhile, leads all rookies with six goals and quickly has adjusted to the smaller North American rinks after his time in Switzerland.

In 91 even-strength minutes together, DeBrincat, Suter and Kane have outshot opponents 53-34 and outscored them 6-3. Their shot-attempt ratio is 59.5% and their scoring-chance ratio 58.7%, rates so good they're nearly off the charts.

The presence of Suter helps drive possession for the other two. Kane and DeBrincat without Suter have outscored opponents 7-3 but have only a 46.4% scoring-chance ratio.

But Kane and DeBrincat are the dangerous weapons of this line. Their growing comfort together has helped them work well in tandem this winter.

"Kane's easy to play with because he makes so many plays," Colliton said. "He's so clean, he rarely turns the puck over, he does a lot of things. . . . But he's also hard to play with because he demands the puck and there's a high level of expectation that you're going to execute because he can."

"[Alex is] used to it now. He knows what he needs to do to be successful. The best thing he can do is be willing to carry the puck, take more responsibility, not always defer."

DeBrincat agreed with that assessment recently.

"I was definitely one of the guys who struggled with [deferring to Kane] at the start," he said. "This year I'm able to find the open spots for him, and I'm figuring out the areas that he likes to look to pass to. So it's a lot easier."

A red-hot first line makes a huge difference for the rest of the team. The Hawks' winningest stretch last season came when Toews, Dominik Kubalik and Brandon Saad were dominant, and that was no coincidence.

The Hawks have found the same thing in Kane, DeBrincat and Suter.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 02.15.2021



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1202808

Chicago Blackhawks

Upcoming road trip will test if Blackhawks are true contenders

John Dietz

Updated 2/14/2021 6:21 PM

"On the road again.

The Blackhawks just can't wait to get on the road again.

The life they love is winning games with their friends.

They just can't wait to get on the road again."

In normal times, Willie Nelson's iconic song may ring true for many Hawks. Road trips are often where friendships are forged, teams get closer and a true sense of brotherhood takes place.

These, of course, are not normal times.

"Yeah, it's boring. That's for sure," said Hawks forward Dylan Strome when asked what traveling around the country is like in the age of coronavirus. "We've got to stay in our hotel rooms. ... You're used to going out for dinner on the road or whatever it may be -- having friends come watch the game or you see them after the game. ...

"It's not as fun, but we're making the most of it."

The next 11 days figure to be challenging ones for the Hawks as they embark on a six-game trip to Detroit, Carolina and Columbus. Their next home games aren't until February 27-28 vs. Detroit.

It's an important stretch for the surprising squad, which is 7-5-4 overall and 7-2-3 in its last 12 games.

When the season began almost nobody gave the Hawks a chance to qualify for the postseason. And, honestly, that's probably still the case.

But coach Jeremy Colliton's squad is tied for fifth in the Central Division with Columbus in points percentage at .563. Dallas (5-3-4, .583) is barely ahead in the fourth and final playoff spot.

With 40 games remaining, it's obviously a bit silly to be talking about the playoffs. Still, a road trip like this could give us a good indication if Patrick Kane, Duncan Keith and Co. have staying power.

"We're almost in February of a normal season (and) coming to crunchtime," Strome said. "You're against your division. Every point and every game matters."

Anything north of 7 standings points in these six games would have to be considered a win. Sweeping hapless Detroit (4-10-2) would be a good way to start. If they pull that off, the Hawks only need 3 points against Carolina (9-3-0, 3-0-0 at home) and Columbus (7-5-4, 4-2-2 at home).

Then sweep the Red Wings again at the end of February and who knows? Maybe a confident, improving bunch of Hawks navigate an absolutely brutal March stretch that includes five matchups against Tampa Bay and four against Florida.

It all starts Monday in Detroit, the Motor City.

So buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Cat scratch fever:

Alex DeBrincat, whose goal in overtime gave the Hawks a 3-2 victory over Columbus on Saturday, has scored six times in the last five games.

It's his hottest stretch since he scored 7 goals in five games late in the 2018-19 season. In that 41-goal campaign, DeBrincat also had a pair of runs where he scored seven times in seven games.

DeBrincat scored Saturday by batting the puck out of midair and past goalie Joonas Korpisalo.

"Obviously I want to be a guy who's put out in all situations and helping the team win," DeBrincat said. "Last year, stuff just wasn't going my way. This year I'm getting bounces, obviously like tonight. Maybe that's not going in most of the time, but tonight it did."

Through Saturday only eight players have more goals than DeBrincat's 8. Auston Matthews (11), Brock Boeser (10) and Tyler Toffoli (10) are the top three.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202809

Chicago Blackhawks

Rozner: Goalie Lankinen giving Blackhawks a chance

Barry Rozner

Updated 2/14/2021 6:04 PM

It was a bit odd watching the Blackhawks squander a pair of 2-goal leads against the Blue Jackets Thursday night.

Odd because they just haven't had many 2-goal leads during the first quarter of this 2021 season.

Also strange because of the narrative that followed that game, and followed them into Saturday night's rematch.

It was all about how an inexperienced team with young kids just couldn't handle the prosperity, how they would have to learn from it and how it's to be expected.

Rookies. Turnovers. Learning experience. Blah, blah, blah.

The truth, however, is that some NHL veterans on the squad were just as responsible for the Hawks letting it get away on Thursday.

It goes back to something head coach Jeremy Colliton has been preaching since he got here, the absolute necessity to think defensively instead of cheat offensively in crucial situations.

That would include having a 2-goal lead in the third period, when getting pucks deep and keeping it simple is a rather reasonable formula.

Sure, some young guys made some big mistakes, especially the young defensemen. And, yes, that's to be expected.

Some of these young defensemen are going to be really good players in a year or two, but until then there's going to be stretches where they're terrible. That's the life of a young defenseman in the NHL.

Ask Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook, both of whom looked awful when they got here.

But when veteran forwards are thinking offense instead of protecting their own net, the puck is -- from time to time -- going to wind up in your own net.

What's been most interesting about the Hawks' last few weeks -- which included a 6-1-4 run before the Columbus defeat -- is that it looks like a team starting to buy into what the coach has been insisting upon since he got here.

A team with zero margin for error needs to be relentless, disciplined, unselfish and smart, thinking defense first and offense when possible.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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That doesn't mean the defense doesn't get involved. In fact, this team will have a hard time scoring if the defense doesn't jump in, but using your brain and supporting the puck is a big part of that.

It's interesting that with so many veterans absent from a year ago, and so many young players in the mix, the team is listening to its coach.

Players don't just want to learn. They want to win and listening to instruction is entirely necessary, especially when voices that might not like the instruction are no longer here or simply not around.

Of course, hard work and buying in are crucial, but let's not mistake as well the main reason why the Hawks were terrible the first three games of the season and considerably better since.

The biggest difference has been Kevin Lankinen, the 25-year-old rookie goaltender and 2020 AHL all-star. He has been superb since gaining the net after the Hawks received horrific goaltending the first few games of the season

Since Lankinen took the net Jan. 19, the Hawks have only lost twice in regulation, both by a goal, both to Columbus and one was after that collapse Thursday, when Lankinen was slightly off, part of the reason the Hawks squandered a great opportunity to keep a winning streak alive.

But Lankinen is allowed an off night, especially after carrying the Hawks for the better part of three weeks. He has been outstanding, turning an awful Hawks beginning into an interesting season.

Rebuilding isn't fun for anyone, even the young kids trying to find their way. They want to win and nothing is better for a team's confidence than terrific goaltending.

The game Thursday night was Lankinen's 10th start in 23 days, so mental fatigue could have been a part of it, and he was back on track Saturday night with another good performance, improving to 6-2-3 with an overtime victory.

While some youngsters made the usual number of errors Saturday, it was again some veterans making selfish plays after the Hawks tied it late, nearly costing the Hawks a point -- and a chance at a pair.

But that narrative isn't nearly as easy and much more subtle, so good luck resisting the urge to put all things bad on the kids.

There's been a lot of good from a lot of young guys, but Lankinen has been very good and he is without question the reason the Hawks took a very ugly start and turned this season into one worth watching.

You can play fast, you can play hard, you can play smart, you can manage the puck and you can buy in with a coach trying to make his voice heard, but if you don't get goaltending there's no reason to even show up at the rink.

Kevin Lankinen -- so far -- has given the Hawks a reason to play.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 02.15.2021

1202899 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs return Thornton to top line, a sign of sticking to the plan

Staff

TORONTO -- You make a change in pro sports when an injury situation forces your hand or something specific stops working. Or when everything careens so far sideways for your team that you need players to show up for the next game wearing casual clothes and work boots in order to shift the mojo.

Otherwise, you stick with what's working.

So it did not rank as a ground-shaking surprise to see Joe Thornton back alongside Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner in a Sunday practice that served as the 41-year-old's last mandated sweat before returning to the Toronto Maple Leafs' lineup.

Remaining Time -1:36

How will Thornton impact Maple Leafs top line alongside Matthews & Marner

That this had become a local point of debate underscores just how well things went during the 10 games Thornton missed with a crack rib. The Leafs went 8-1-1, Marner put up 16 points and Matthews scored nine times despite also missing one of those games himself.

That's a sign of how fabulously everything progressed with Zach Hyman skating in Thornton's left-wing spot on the top line. But it didn't produce an overwhelming case to keep him stationed there in the larger context of what's best for the team from top to bottom.

Remember that Thornton was signed by Toronto with a specific role in mind and placed alongside Matthews and Marner right from his first skate before training camp. Remember, too, that 97-34-16 dominated in nearly 50 minutes of 5-on-5 play together before Thornton was injured on an innocent-looking check from Edmonton's Josh Archibald -- with the Leafs not surrendering even one high danger-chance against in those situations, while controlling shot attempts (73.5 per cent), shots (63.2 per cent), expected goals (73.7 per cent) and scoring chances (79.1 per cent).

There was enough there for head coach Sheldon Keefe to restore the line as soon as Thornton's health allowed. They'll likely be sent out to start Monday's visit by the Ottawa Senators at Scotiabank Arena.

"I think the line had enough success and did enough good things in that short window that I didn't want just an unfortunate injury to Joe to disrupt what was our plan to go with at the start of the season," Keefe said. "I don't think the sample was big enough to make any real determinations either way, for the matter. But we want to give it a little more runway here and we're obviously hoping that it can stick."

You need to get a true read on whether it works before deciding it doesn't. There could also be an ancillary benefit gained if John Tavares and William Nylander manage to get some traction with Hyman after seeing a rotating cast of players cycle through the open audition on the team's second line, and the previous underlying results for that trio suggest they likely will.

But this is about Thornton, too.

While his Hall of Fame talents may be diminished with age, he clearly had something to offer in those first handful of games with the Leafs. His infectious personality remains a source of curiosity here in his new home -- "I think it'll be a big boost, especially with just the vibe in the room, the team morale," Morgan Rielly said Sunday when asked about Thornton's impending return -- but we should not let it completely overshadow what he can still do on the ice.

Keefe always figured Thornton would complement Matthews and Marner nicely because of his ability to control the puck down low, plus the legendary passing ability that's seen him amass more assists than all but six other players in NHL history.

"Probably the area that I had maybe underestimated a little bit was Joe's ability to win the puck back," Keefe said. "Just the number of times where he was tracking guys from behind and with his reach got a stick on puck, created so many loose pucks and turnovers and opportunities for Mitch and Auston going the other way.

"Those kind of things really stood out."

His is a specialized role, which makes sense given how unique the player is.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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There will be some shifts at 5-on-5 where Hyman or even Tavares takes a turn in Thornton's spot -- a nod to the fact he can't handle 17 or 18 even-strength minutes per night like his much younger linemates.

Thornton was beaming Sunday at the prospect of rejoining the lineup. He's been outfitted with extra padding around his ribs and feels comfortable with the pain management after taking plenty of contact during recent skates, saying, "The hardest part is over."

He's also had a chance to get in some extra skills work with the player development staff and watch his new teammates climb to the top of the North Division. There's a healthy appreciation for the role he's stepping back into with Marner and Matthews, too.

"Feels good," he said. "Obviously two very talented players that are playing really well right now, so I'm just hoping to keep the good play going I guess."

Under the circumstances, it only made sense to give it another go.

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets' quarter-mark report: Lopsided schedule makes Winnipeg hard to read

Staff

WINNIPEG — The heavy lifting is around the corner, but what kind of conclusions can be drawn about the Winnipeg Jets as they hit the quarter mark of this compressed NHL season?

To be frank, the jury is most definitely still out.

Thanks to another final-minute communication breakdown resulting in a buzzer-beater for the Ottawa Senators in the 2-1 loss for the Jets on Saturday afternoon, Winnipeg was left to wonder what might have been had the game made it to three-on-three overtime.

It was the second time this season the Jets allowed a goal in the final 10 seconds of regulation (once with 8.2 seconds to go and another with just 0.7 seconds left on the clock) and the third time they've lost a game during the final two minutes (that one other coming earlier this week when the Calgary Flames scored a power-play marker with 1:42 to go).

Blown leads are going to happen over the course of the season, but learning from those moments and getting better at protecting leads is a foundational piece for teams that win consistently.

"Any team can score in any given moment. You can't give them those chances," Jets centre Mark Scheifele said. "You can't lose that focus. You can't lose that thought in your head that the game is not over until the buzzer rings."

Is it too early to suggest the Jets' inability to close games out is already becoming a trend?

"In those three games, if we'd had the lead or it was tight and the other team took it to us, then you can say that there's something to that," Jets head coach Paul Maurice said. "With three of them in this short period of time, you're not happy about it, but there's not a specific event that's taken place."

Because it wasn't a recurring theme — like a missed assignment in the slot — that's occurred on multiple occasions, Maurice was adamant in his response.

On the flip side, the Jets have already scored twice with the goalie out in favour of the extra attacker, winning once in overtime and dropping the other game in a shootout.

Things like that generally have a way of coming out in the wash, and this small sample size backs that theory up.

The Jets' top priority coming into this season was tightening up as a five-man unit defensively and cutting down on the number of high-danger chances allowed.

That remains a work in progress, though there has been some incremental growth in terms of not leaning quite as heavily on the goaltenders to cover up a number of those D-zone mistakes.

The other thing to consider is that the Jets have played the Senators and Calgary Flames five times each in the first quarter, while playing the division-leading Toronto Maple Leafs just once (and not seeing the Montreal Canadiens at all).

Teams can only play who is on the schedule, but it's fair to say things should come into clearer focus during this next 14-game block — which includes three games against the Maple Leafs, three against the Canadiens and four against the Vancouver Canucks.

### WHERE THE JETS ARE RELATIVE TO EXPECTATION

The Jets were one of the teams in the North Division that had a wide variation when it came to predictions and projections, though many observers had them on the outside looking in when it came to the four playoff teams.

For the record, I had the Jets finishing fourth in the North. To this point, the Jets are third in points percentage, so they're slightly ahead of the game when it comes to expectations, relatively speaking.

### TOP-SIX FORWARDS GRADE: B

Before we dig too deep into this, let's not forget the Jets had either Patrik Laine or Pierre-Luc Dubois (the player Laine was traded for) in the lineup for only three games in the first quarter of the season due to injury and/or quarantine rules.

That fact simply can't be ignored.

Mark Scheifele remains among the leading scorers in the NHL with 18 points, Nikolaj Ehlers has continued to progress and is producing at an outstanding rate (team-leading nine goals and 16 points) and Kyle Connor has scored four of his seven goals on the power play.

Andrew Copp got bumped into the top-six role after Laine was hurt, and he's taken full advantage of the opportunity to earn some additional ice time, racking up 12 points.

Jets captain Blake Wheeler looks like he's been battling through an injury, but he was skating better on Saturday than he had in several weeks and was double-shifted on occasion.

He's also found a way to chip in offensively (12 points), even if something seemed off and things have been challenging at five-on-five.

### BOTTOM-SIX FORWARDS GRADE: B

This one is a bit misleading, because the third line — which has primarily been Adam Lowry, Mason Appleton and Mathieu Perreault — would receive an A for their efforts.

Lowry has rebounded nicely from an injury-plagued season (chipping in four goals and nine points), Appleton has taken the next step offensively (eight points, the same number he had in 46 games last season), while Perreault has been sipping from the fountain of youth — seemingly refreshed after the extra time to get healthy and back to creating chaos on the forecheck.

The fourth line has been a bit of a revolving door — some of which is related to injury — and there haven't been enough games where the Jets have done anything other than tread water with that group on the ice.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Once Dubois is back to full health (he missed Saturday's game with a lower-body injury and is officially listed as day-to-day), Paul Stastny is likely to move back to left wing on the Lowry line, which will bolster the depth and create a trickle-down effect as Perreault moves to the fourth line.

The pending return of Jansen Harkins (who has been limited to nine games by a lower-body injury) should help provide a boost for the fourth line, too.

The big decision for Maurice during the coming weeks will revolve around whether he finds more opportunities for the likes of Kristian Vesalainen and David Gustafsson, or if he leans on Nate Thompson (once he's healthy) and Trevor Lewis.

### DEFENCE GRADE: C

It's been a mixed bag for the defence corps so far, with nine blue-liners already suiting up in at least one game.

The most stable pairing has been Neal Pionk with Derek Forbort, and they've handled the shutdown role in the bulk of the games.

Despite being removed from the top power-play unit, Pionk still leads Jets blue-liners in points (10, including eight at even strength) and he's added a more physical element to his game.

Forbort has proven to be an excellent addition on a low-cost free-agent deal, helping the penalty kill, capably handling the boost in ice time and providing some unexpected offence (one goal, six points).

The play of Josh Morrissey has been a bit uneven so far, but he figures to benefit from having a more regular partner and getting back onto his natural side.

A reunion with Dylan DeMelo is one option that could ultimately help both players get back to peak performance.

Tucker Poolman has played two games after recovering from COVID-19, and he's starting to find his way — while the play of Logan Stanley through 13 games has made it difficult for the coaching staff to take him out of the lineup once the Jets return to the more traditional deployment of 12 forwards and six defencemen.

### GOALTENDING GRADE: B

Connor Hellebuyck remains the backbone of this hockey club, and after a couple of hiccups in the early stages of the season (which included several soft goals against), the reigning Vezina Trophy winner has returned to form.

Hellebuyck has been locked in of late, providing the type of goaltending the Jets have come to expect.

"He's just been big and square in the net," Maurice said.

Another important development for the Jets has been the play of backup Laurent Brossoit, who has posted a .918 save percentage through three starts.

With 17 games for the Jets in March, Brossoit is going to be a bit busier, allowing Hellebuyck to find the perfect balance between staying fresh and remaining sharp.

### A BIG QUESTION FOR THE SECOND QUARTER

What type of impact will Pierre-Luc Dubois have?

After going three full weeks without playing a full game, and being off the ice completely for 14 full days, Dubois got into two games over three days before hitting what appears to be a minor speed bump (the undisclosed lower-body injury).

Remaining Time -0:57

Ehlers praises Dubois for trying to build chemistry quickly with Jets

There were some glimpses of the type of impact Dubois could have on his new team during those first two games (his speed, passing ability and power were all on display), even if he's yet to record a shot on goal.

As Dubois works to get into more of a rhythm with a busy schedule on the horizon, his impact should be felt at both ends of the rink and will help create plenty of matchup challenges for the Jets' opponents.

With Maurice reuniting Scheifele with Connor and Wheeler on Saturday, Dubois might soon find himself between Ehlers and Copp on what could be a highly-effective and dynamic line.

The internal competition among forwards for ice time should also push the entire group to raise their collective compete level.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames quarter-mark report: Consistency remains team's biggest obstacle

Eric Francis

February 14, 2021, 7:22 PM

One quarter of the way through the season, there's one significant issue dogging the Calgary Flames.

"We just need more consistency — that's the biggest thing," said coach Geoff Ward.

Slow starts and wild fluctuations in play from period to period have become the team's trademarks this year, prompting them to spot clubs one or two goal leads on the power of 12 or 15 shot advantages.

They've done well to dig themselves out of many holes along the way, thanks to Jacob Markstrom's netminding and a power play that has helped several stars maintain productivity.

However, it's not a recipe for success over the course of 56 games, and they know it.

Asked what letter grade he'd hand his team thus far, Mark Giordano begged off on a technicality.

"They don't do letters anymore in school — with my son, they do 'excellent' or 'very good' and all that," chuckled the captain of the 7-6-1 squad.

"I'm not going to put a letter on it, but I would say we're not where we want to be 100% as a team. We've had moments where we've been good. But we know we can get a way more consistent 60-minute game night in and night out. We're trending in the right direction but we're not quite there yet."

On Saturday, as the teacher was finalizing their report cards, the Flames were consistently bad for three straight periods, losing 3-1 to a desperate Canucks club that out-shot Calgary a whopping 46-19.

So much for the swagger the team was starting to develop thanks to three previous wins.

### WHERE THEY ARE RELATIVE TO EXPECTATIONS?

A notoriously slow-starting team, few should be shocked the Flames are performing below expectations to open the quirkiest year imaginable.

Given the team's depth up front, and shiny new goalie, many pegged the Flames to be one of the North division's frontrunners.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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No one predicted the Flames would be one of the three teams to miss the playoffs, which is exactly where the fifth-placed club sits right now.

For a team that will be judged entirely on its playoff success, missing the postseason altogether would be an unmitigated disaster.

That said, it's early and the Flames have games in hand on most division rivals.

### TOP-SIX FORWARDS GRADE: B

The stars haven't been this team's problem.

Johnny Gaudreau has bounced back from last season by scoring eight times and notching 15 points in a 14-game start that has seen him accrue points in all but two games.

The fastest start of his career has come with a productive Sean Monahan by his side, and the recent addition of Sam Bennett, who has two goals in four games since his promotion.

Remaining Time -0:39

Gaudreau roofs puck top shelf for powerplay goal vs. Canadiens

They have benefitted from Elias Lindholm's move to centre where the Swedish star, Matthew Tkachuk and Dillon Dube have drawn plenty of attention from the opposition's top checkers.

Both lines have played a solid, two-way game, spearheading the offence for a team that sits a surprising 21st in both goals for per game and goals against per game.

All except Bennett have been a big part of the team's power-play success, operating at a 21.8% clip that would have ranked them four spots higher than 14th in the league had two goals against Vancouver last week not come one second after the power play expired.

### BOTTOM-SIX FORWARD GRADE: C

What was supposed to be the team's biggest strength has been one of its biggest problems so far.

A recent surge by Mikael Backlund and new linemates Milan Lucic and Andrew Mangiapane appeared to finally be turning their fortunes until Backlund was injured Saturday. (He was listed as day-to-day Sunday).

The team has struggled to find productive roles for newbies Josh Leivo and Dominik Simon, who are now out of the lineup if not on the fourth line with another newcomer, Joakim Nordstrom.

It doesn't help that Derek Ryan is out with a broken finger, thrusting Byron Froese into third line centring duties.

### DEFENCE GRADE: B-

Much has been made about Rasmus Andersson's seamless transition to the top pairing alongside Mark Giordano. They've been solid, while also taking turns running the power play.

However, the team's best duo has been Noah Hanifin and free agent signing Chris Tanev, who didn't surrender a 5-on-5 goal until Game 9.

Tanev's stability has allowed Hanifin to explore more offensively, making them dynamic at both ends of the ice.

The third pairing has been an adventure at times, but management is happy enough with Juuso Valimaki and Nikita Nesterov that the only time the team subbed in a defenceman all season was Saturday when the Russian rearguard was replaced by Connor Mackey.

The group has done well to help Markstrom shine by blocking shots and clearing lanes and rebounds.

### GOALTENDING GRADE: A

No free agent signing has had a bigger impact on a team than the one Markstrom has had on the Flames.

The man swiped from Vancouver with a six-year, \$36 million contract has stolen several games for the Flames and helped keep them in all the others with an MVP-type consistency and excellence.

The 31-year-old is sporting a stellar 2.33 GAA and .925 save percentage, providing a backbone for a Flames team that might otherwise be fighting to keep its season alive without his heroics.

On a scary note, the play of backup David Rittich already has many concerned about the possibility of burning Markstrom out. Rittich has lost both his starts this season and is still trying to find the form and confidence he lost late last year. It has forced the coach to play Markstrom much more than he expected to and it is making it harder and harder to find spots for Rittich to step in.

### A BIG QUESTION FOR THE SECOND QUARTER

The big question does not revolve around Sam Bennett's future with the club. Minor issue.

A far more pressing concern revolves around whether this team's questionable compete level can rise on a more consistent basis.

On paper, this team has the tools to compete for the division crown.

On the ice, it has been a much different story.

Trying to put their fingers on why will be the focal point moving forward.

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Tavares, Nylander working on adjustments in tighter structure

By Mark Masters

William Nylander has failed to hit the scoresheet in four straight games, mustering just five shots in that stretch.

"He's trying to find his game here offensively and try to find his way within the division and the way that the games are going and the way that teams key in on him make it hard," coach Sheldon Keefe said.

The Leafs are playing a tighter brand of hockey this season, which is also an adjustment.

"Because of how we are playing defensively, the games just naturally aren't as open as they were previously," Keefe noted. "You've got to adjust and find ways to play within that. I think that's where he and a lot of guys on our team are still trying to find themselves offensively."

Nylander and linemate John Tavares have combined for just four even-strength goals while seeing Jimmy Vesey, Wayne Simmonds and Ilya Mikheyev rotate in on their wing.

With Joe Thornton ready to return after missing 10 games, Toronto's top-six will be tweaked on Monday night. Thornton will slot back in with Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner while Zach Hyman joins Tavares and Nylander.

Hyman, who leads the Leafs at plus-11, has produced seven points in the last six games.

"He's really found his game, really found his legs," Keefe observed. "He was a standout for us yesterday in terms of dealing with the physicality and playing through that and still being effective ... The way he skates and protects the puck, transports it from our zone to the offensive zone and gets it back down there, we're hoping can really help JT and Will find their game and have things really come together for them."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Keefe pointed out that the Tavares line created a lot of offence last season, but also gave up a lot in the defensive end. Tavares finished minus-seven while Nylander was minus-two.

Tavares is plus-five this season while Nylander is plus-three, but the pair have too often been one-and-done on the attack.

"We'd like to sustain a little bit more time in the offensive zone," Tavares acknowledged after Saturday's 2-1 loss to the Canadiens. "I'd like to see us get a few more pucks towards the net and just get towards the net a little bit more. You want to find open ice and find each other, but sometimes just getting pucks towards the net, winning some loose pucks, and just being hard on it around the net will lead to some good things and allow some of those plays to open up throughout the offensive zone."

Leafs Ice Chips: Will Hyman spark Tavares and Nylander?

Joe Thornton's return Monday night is allowing Sheldon Keefe to juggle his lines a little bit, which might spark John Tavares and William Nylander, who have been struggling to produce offence at even strength. The pair had a new linemate at practice Sunday, Zach Hyman, who has been heating up of late. Mark Masters has more.

ut since sustaining a fractured rib courtesy of a hit by Edmonton's Josh Archibald on Jan. 20, Thornton has now taken part in three full practices in the last week.

"I got the proper pads in and I've been taking some light hits and some big hits and medium hits so right now I feel really good," Thornton said. "I got no restrictions so the hardest part's over. The rehab's pretty much over and now I can just go out and focus on playing ... I can't wait to play tomorrow."

The trio of Thornton, Matthews and Marner seemed to be generating some good chemistry before the 41-year-old got hurt in the fifth game of the year.

"A lot of the things that I was hoping would happen with the line were happening," Keefe recalled. "Joe with his skill set and the way that he moves the puck complemented those guys very well. Joe [was] a presence down below the hashmarks in the offensive zone. I don't think the sample was big enough to make any real determinations either way so wanted to give it a little more runway here."

Thornton's fit alongside the pair of 23-year-olds was actually better than Keefe initially anticipated.

"The area that I had maybe underestimated a little bit is Joe's ability to win the puck back," the coach said, "and the number of times when he was tracking guys from behind and the way he got a stick on pucks and created so many loose pucks and turnovers and opportunities for Mitch and Auston going the other way. Those kind of things really stood out to me. The line had enough success and did enough good things in that short window that I didn't want an unfortunate injury to Joe to disrupt what was our plan to go with to start the season."

The Leafs went 8-1-1 without Thornton. Marner led the team with 16 points in that stretch. Matthews, who missed a game with his own injury, had nine goals in nine games.

"The way they see the ice is very rare and they play off each other very, very nicely," Thornton said. "They're both dangerous threats when they have the puck and they see each other very nicely and it will keep on improving as they keep playing together."

Thornton picked up his first goal as a Leaf against the Senators, who will be visiting Scotiabank Arena for three games in four nights starting Monday.

'I can't wait to play': Thornton reunited with Matthews-Marner

After missing the last 10 games with a rib injury, Maple Leafs forward Joe Thornton discusses how excited he is to return against the Senators Monday, and to be reunited with red-hot duo Mitch Marner and Auston Matthews on a line.

Thornton's return will help fill the void created by an injury to Simmonds who is one week into a six-week rehab for a broken wrist. Simmonds is a vocal guy in the room, who brings a lot of energy. Thornton, meanwhile, oozes positive energy.

"Just how much he loves being at the rink," said defenceman Morgan Rielly when asked what stands out. "He really loves being around his teammates. He's happy when he's here. I mean, he's here late. He's in the gym doing his thing. He enjoys his work and that's inspiring ... It will be a big boost especially with just the vibe in the room and the team morale. When he's around everyone's a bit more upbeat, a bit more happy."

Thornton may also spark a power play that has gone 0/5 in three games following the injury to Simmonds. Toronto never really got set up on its one opportunity against Montreal on Saturday with Keefe suggesting that may have been a turning point in the game.

"We haven't had as many opportunities to really find much rhythm with the power play," said Keefe of the dry spell. "Also, we've had some disruptions. First you have to adapt to Joe leaving and then Simmonds leaves the lineup and we tried some different things to see how it could work and it hasn't quite been there for us in terms of the chemistry and rhythm of it."

Toronto still ranks third in the NHL on the power play with a 34.1 per cent conversion rate.

Thornton is expected to return to his bumper position on the Matthews-Marner unit although the team didn't do any special teams work during Sunday's practice. Nic Petan and Alex Kerfoot took turns in that spot with Thornton out.

"Penalty kills get better over the course of the season," Keefe said. "That's just the way it goes. Other teams adjust to you. We play a lot of the same terms over and over."

The Leafs scored on three of nine chances against the Senators during two games in Ottawa last month.

'You can't fill his shoes': Leafs react to Simmonds' injury

Head coach Sheldon Keefe confirmed the news that Wayne Simmonds will be out approximately six weeks with a broken wrist. On Monday, the Maple Leafs spoke about Simmonds' impact on the team and what they'll miss with him out of the lineup.

Frederik Andersen, who has started eight straight games for the Leafs, departed practice early on Sunday.

"Just a rest situation," Keefe explained. "I told him to do what he needed. With three goalies, it gives us the opportunity to limit his workload in practice. He got a session in with [goalie coach] Steve Briere before practice and wanted to take a drill in the practice itself and then called it a day."

Andersen got a nice shout out from Thornton, who was asked what he's liking about the team's 11-3-1 start.

"Freddie Andersen's been unbelievable," the greybeard gushed. "I really didn't know too much about Freddie coming in here, but seeing him play 13 games, this guy's a stud."

After allowing nine goals in the first two games of the season, including five to the Senators during a loss in Ottawa, Andersen has gone 8-2-1 with a .922 save percentage.

'This guy's a stud': Andersen gets some rest and some love from Thornton

After Frederik Andersen left practice on Sunday, Maple Leafs head coach Sheldon Keefe explains that it was just to give his goaltender a little rest, while forward Joe Thornton describes how amazed he is by Freddie's play since joining Toronto.

TJ Brodie was asked to assess his chemistry with defence partner Rielly.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"It's coming," Brodie said. "There's always room for improvement, but he's easy to play with. He's always available for passes and he's talking to me when I'm going back for the puck. His feet are always going and he's always looking to jump so it's definitely fun to play with him."

What stands out to Rielly about Brodie?

"Everything," the 26-year-old said. "How calm he is. How well he moves the puck. He's extremely good defensively with his gap. The way he breaks the puck out with a great first pass. He's just extremely reliable. I feel lucky to be playing with him. We'll keep building and trying to get better, but I think he's been outstanding."

The Leafs have focused on cutting down on rush chances against this season, but when there have been breakdowns, Brodie has proven adept at disrupting two-on-one rushes.

"It's a combination of different things that I've learned throughout the years," Brodie explained. "Timing is definitely big and trying to read what the guy's looking at and then just trying to be in the passing lane and slowly taking away from the middle of the ice to the short-side post so they have a little bit less of an angle and room to make a play."

Brodie with another good play on a 2-on-1 against  
[pic.twitter.com/4mSJyb9zJN](https://pic.twitter.com/4mSJyb9zJN)

— Omar (@TicTacTOmar) February 14, 2021

'His feet are always going': Brodie says chemistry with Rielly is growing

Maple Leafs defenceman T.J. Brodie discusses his growing chemistry on the ice with Morgan Rielly, while Rielly shares what he's appreciated the most so far about Brodie's game.

Toronto's bottom two lines also had a new look at practice with Kerfoot skating between Pierre Engvall and Mikheyev and Jason Spezza skating between Vesey and Scott Sabourin.

"We haven't made any final determinations," cautioned Keefe. "I wouldn't assume anything based on today's practice."

Sabourin, who played 35 games with the Senators last season, signed a one-year, two-way deal in the aftermath of the Simmonds injury.

"He's obviously a different type of player than we have here and brings a lot in terms of his presence," Keefe said. "He's got good size [6-foot-3, 208 pounds]. He's a very competitive, very physical player. He's got a real good energy about him."

Sunday marked Sabourin's first full practice with the team.

"He hasn't had as much time with our group and that's why we wanted to have him on a line in practice today so he got a little more involved with our game players," Keefe explained. "It helps him with that transition."

Lines at Sunday's practice:

Thornton - Matthews - Marner

Nylander - Tavares - Hyman

Engvall - Kerfoot - Mikheyev

Vesey - Spezza - Sabourin

Petan - Boyd - Barabanov

Rielly - Brodie

Muzzin - Holl

Dermott - Bogosian

Lehtonen - Marincin

Andersen

Hutchinson

Woll

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Veteran Thornton 'can't wait' to return to Leafs' lineup

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — Joe Thornton was just five games into his Maple Leafs' career when a collision with Edmonton's Josh Archibald caused a fractured rib that's kept the veteran sidelined for the last month. It was hardly the start Thornton was looking for in Toronto, and coming off his first full practice since the injury on Sunday, he's more ready than ever to get back to work.

"It was unfortunate, but I feel really good now and I can't wait to play [Monday versus Ottawa]," Thornton told reporters on a Zoom call Sunday. "I got the proper pads in and I've been taking some light hits and some big hits and medium hits, so right now I feel really good. I've got no restrictions. The hardest part is over, the rehab is pretty much over, and now I can just go out and focus on playing."

Thornton's missed 10 games for the Leafs since exiting in the third period of that Jan. 20 tilt against Edmonton. At that point the forward was just beginning to find a rhythm with his new team, and having pocketed one goal and two points in his first five outings.

Despite the short time frame, Thornton had also begun developing strong chemistry with linemates Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner, and was a fixture on the team's top power play. Thornton was back on his previous perch on the Leafs' top line during Sunday's practice, and was looking forward to adding onto what his two young teammates have recently accomplished. In the 10 games Thornton's been absent, Matthews tallied nine goals and three assists while Marner had four goals and 12 assists.

"[They're] two very talented players that are playing really well right now so just hoping to keep the good play going," Thornton said. "The way they see the ice is very rare and I think they play off each other very nicely. Mitch has added a new element to his game with his shooting so I think they're both dangerous threats when they have the puck, and they just see each other very nicely."

Based on what head coach Sheldon Keefe saw from that trio early prior to Thornton's injury, he had no hesitation about reuniting them, and believes there's plenty more potential they can tap into.

"I just thought they had good chemistry," Keefe explained. "I thought a lot of the things that I was hoping would happen with the line were happening and that Joe with his skill set and the way that he moves the puck complemented those guys very well, and also that Joe would be a presence down below the hashmarks in the offensive zone, and he did that very well for them."

In fact, Keefe admitted to being somewhat surprised even at how well the line operated. Per Natural Stat Trick, over that five-game sample as a unit they registered nearly 74 per cent possession and 34 scoring chances for, compared to just nine against.

"Probably the area that I had maybe underestimated a little bit is Joe's ability to win the puck back," Keefe said. "He was tracking guys from behind and with his reach got a stick on pucks and created so many loose pucks and turnovers and opportunities for Mitch and Auston going the other way. Those kinds of things really stood out to me and I think the line had enough success and did enough good things in that short window that I didn't want an unfortunate injury to Joe to disrupt what was our plan to go with to start the season."



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To make room for Thornton's return, Keefe had to do some shuffling elsewhere.

Ironically, the Leafs just posted on Saturday their first regulation loss since the game Thornton was injured, a 2-1 defeat against Montreal. That outcome alone was likely to spark some further lineup changes that Keefe ultimately tinkered with during Sunday's practice: Nic Petan and Travis Boyd were both moved down to the taxi squad, while Scott Sabourin was promoted and is now poised to make his Leafs' debut Monday on the fourth line with newly-demoted Jimmy Vesey and stalwart Jason Spezza. Toronto just signed Sabourin to a one-year, two-way \$700,000 contract last week.

Meanwhile, with Thornton occupying the wing alongside Matthews and Marnier again, Zach Hyman slid down to skate with John Tavares and William Nylander, while Ilya Mikheyev and Pierre Engvall flank Alex Kerfoot on the third unit.

It made for a lot of moving parts, but Keefe claimed not to be committed to anything before Toronto faces Ottawa for the first of three meetings against one another in four nights.

"We haven't made any final determinations," Keefe insisted. "I wouldn't assume anything based on today's practice."

What was clear from the session though was how much the Leafs enjoy having Thornton in their midst again on the ice.

"I think it'll be a big boost [having him back], especially with just the vibe in the room, the team morale," said Morgan Rielly. "When he's around, everyone is a bit more upbeat, a bit more happy if you will and I think that he just brings a lot. He's a great player obviously, his career speaks for itself, but I think he's got great leadership [skills] and we're looking forward to having him back."

Thornton has been pleased with what the Leafs have shown in these weeks without him though, from weathering another key injury to Wayne Simmonds on Feb. 6 to finding ways to win tight games. Toronto's already sitting atop the North Division at 11-3-1 on the season, and Thornton only sees them going higher.

"I like a lot of things," he said. "I think the powerplay has been great [at 34.1 per cent], five-on-five looks strong. I think Frederik Andersen's been unbelievable. I really didn't know too much about Freddy coming in here but seeing him play [so far], this guy's a stud. So things are going real good right now."

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