



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### What happened to Dougie Hamilton's goal scoring for the Hurricanes?

By Chip Alexander

For those who may have forgotten how Dougie Hamilton scored his last goal, here's the way it went down:

The Carolina Hurricanes defenseman was stationed at the right point as a pass from Ryan Dzingel came up the wall. In pursuit of the puck was forward Liam Foudy of the Columbus Blue Jackets, but Hamilton beat him to it and quickly lifted the puck toward the net.

Mike Maniscalco, the Canes' broadcast play-by-play man, likened it to an "Eephus pitch" in baseball, a good description of the high, floating puck. Columbus defenseman David Savard, in the slot, tried to jump and swat it out of the air with a glove and appeared to get a piece. But the puck sailed past goalie Joonas Korpisalo and into the net.

That knuckler gave the Canes a 6-4 lead and was the winning goal in a 6-5 victory. The goal was also Hamilton's first in Nationwide Arena since breaking a leg there on Jan. 16, 2020.

That most recent goal came on Feb. 7, in the Canes' ninth game of the season. It is also Hamilton's only goal this season, as the curious case of Hamilton and his baffling goal-scoring drought continues.

In 23 games, Hamilton has taken 70 shots. Some have been tipped and redirected by his teammates for goals, helping him to a team-leading 15 assists this season. He had two assists Thursday in the Canes' 5-2 win over the Detroit Red Wings, when he had three shots and also blocked three shots.

But a year after scoring 14 goals in 47 games, he has just the one.

Jacob Slavin, Hamilton's defensive partner on the Canes' top pairing, said he has not sensed any frustration in Hamilton because of his lack of scoring.

"I think he's been handling it fine," Slavin said on Saturday's media call. "It's part of the game. You've got your ups, got your downs. He's been in the league for a long time. He's had his chances and they're going to start going in soon enough.

"He's just going to continue to stick with it and they're going to go in eventually, knowing the type of player he is and the ability he has to put the puck in the net. Soon enough, they're going to go in."

According to the NHL's stats, Hamilton has taken 25 wrist shots, 21 snap shots and 20 slap shots this season, along with two backhanders and two deflections — the Columbus goal was classified a snap shot. He leads the league with 36 missed shots that were wide of the net.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour has used the "just a matter of time" line a few times in describing Hamilton, who has

averaged 14 goals in the past six seasons and scored on a career-high 8.2 percent of his shots last season,

"We obviously want him to put up numbers, but it's more important he's sound defensively," Brind'Amour said on a media call last week.

Hamilton, recently asked to assess his goal-scoring problems, said, "You can always be better, I think, trying to find spots to get looks and things like that. It took some time but I think I'm starting to get more looks recently. Hit a couple of posts and crossbars.

"It's definitely a different feel if some of those go in and you feel better about yourself. I'd definitely like to be able to produce more offense and help the team that way."

Contract on the horizon

It's an important season for Hamilton. He's in the final year of a six-year contract that has paid him an average of \$5.75 million, the highest among Canes defensemen. He is scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent after the season and has stated that he hopes to stay with the Hurricanes, his third team since entering the NHL in 2012-13 with the Boston Bruins.

Hamilton now has played almost half as many games this season as he did last season, and some of his metrics proportionately are lower by comparison. He has blocked 21 shots compared to 63 last season, and has 20 hits compared to 52. He has created 11 rebounds off shots to last year's 30, according to the Naturalstatrck.com hockey analytics site.

And the goals. After 23 games last season, Hamilton had 10.

Despite Hamilton's goal-scoring woes — and even with forward Teuvo Teravainen slowed by COVID-19 and then a concussion — the Canes (16-6-1) were fourth in the NHL in goals per game (3.35) and fourth in power-play percentage (30.1 percent) through Friday's games.

According to Naturalstatrck.com, the Canes are among the league leaders at all strengths in Corsi percentage, which is one measure of puck possession, as well as scoring-chance percentage.

The Canes rank 17th in the NHL in five-on-five shooting percentage at 7.89 percent. But they're eighth at all strengths at 10.56 percent because of their power-play scoring, where they have an NHL-best 20.8 shooting percentage.

What does all that mean?

"I think it says we have a lot of depth for scoring," Brind'Amour said Saturday. "We have a lot of different options now whereas in the past if you shut down one or two of our top guys, it made it hard to score. Now we have a few more options."



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Of note

The Canes on Saturday signed goaltender Beck Warm to a two-year, entry-level contract. The deal will pay Warm \$700,000 in 2020-21 and \$750,000 in 2021-22 at the NHL level or \$60,000 at the AHL level for both seasons, and he received a signing bonus of \$50,000.

Warm, 21, has a 4-0-0 record, 2.25 goals-against average and .940 save percentage in four AHL games with the Chicago Wolves this season.

Carolina Hurricanes vs. Florida Panthers

When: Sunday, 5 p.m.

Where: PNC Arena, Raleigh.

TV: FSCR



## Rest is a Weapon for the Canes

Niederreiter: 'It's great to get a little recovery going and go right back at it'

By Michael Smith

I'm going to be honest. I woke up today thinking I had forgotten to write a game preview.

Instead, Saturday, March 6 was just a practice day for the Carolina Hurricanes.

An informal straw poll around the locker room showed that I wasn't alone. Other players and staff had similar thoughts running through their minds this morning.

"I had to check our team app just to make sure everything was right and I was headed to the right place," Jacob Slavin said. "It's crazy that it seems like every other day we're playing a game. You grind through it."

"You're in such a rhythm. Even today, I wasn't sure what day exactly it was," Nino Niederreiter said. "It felt great, and everyone is excited for tomorrow to keep going."

The Canes have been playing at least a game every other day since Feb. 11. It was a stretch of 13 games in 22 days, one game every 1.69 days. It was a frantic pace, one of the densest stretches of the season, and everyone's body - even those of us who were simply covering these games - had settled into a rhythm.

Saturday, the body said, should be a gameday. But it wasn't, and that was a welcome reprieve, especially to the mind.

"It was like Groundhog Day. Prepare, play, prepare, play. And we were on the road forever, too. ... It's just tough, I guess is the way I'd put it, mentally," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Guys being able to go home, be with their families and have a normal routine for a couple of days is probably what they needed."

It was just over a week ago when it sounded like Brind'Amour was dropping bars from a Smash Mouth classic.

"The games just keep coming," he said.

And they don't stop coming.

So, any sort of break - especially two days in between games, about as luxurious as it gets in this 56-game sprint - is valuable time to reset and refresh.

"It's huge. My body feels pretty good today. That's a treat, and it's huge mentally," Slavin said. "We take those days when we can to enjoy them away from the rink with family and get our minds off the game a little bit."

This two-day gap in between hosting the Detroit Red Wings and Florida Panthers is the Canes' first of four such breaks this month. In March, the Canes play 14 games in 30 days, or one game every 2.14 days. The Canes knocked out their only back-to-back set of the month earlier this week, and the remaining March schedule is just 12 games in 27 days, or one game every 2.25 days. In either case, it's a leisurely pace relative to what came before it and how the Canes will finish the season.

In April and May, the Canes will play 22 games in 40 days, or one game every 1.82 days. There's just one two-day gap in between games, and the team will play four back-to-backs. The upside to the otherwise hellish pace is that 13 of the Canes' 22 games will be played at home, including a season-long, eight-game homestand in the first half of April.

The Canes don't analyze such a satellite-level view of the road ahead. As Brind'Amour and head strength and conditioning coach Bill Burniston have said, "We're big on going 1-0 and focusing on today."

Friday was an off day. Saturday, contrary to the body's hunches, was a practice day. Sunday is a gameday. Tuesday is a gameday. Thursday is a gameday. And then the Canes get another two days in between games.

Rest is a weapon, and this month is maybe the Canes' best chance to use it to their advantage.



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"It actually feels great," Niederreiter said. "It's amazing how it feels when you're just right at it the whole time and then you

have two days in between. It feels like forever. It's great to get a little recovery going and go right back at it."

## Preview: Panthers vs. Hurricanes

Two teams meet for third time in nine days

By Michael Smith

An early Sunday evening puck drop pits the Carolina Hurricanes against the Florida Panthers for the third time in nine days.

The Match-Up

Florida Panthers (15-4-4, 34 points) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (16-6-1, 33 points)

Sunday, March 7, 5 p.m.

Watch: FOX Sports Carolinas, FOX Sports GO

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

Numbers to Know

100: Rod Brind'Amour earned his 100th career win as head coach on Thursday night. It took Brind'Amour 173 games to accomplish the feat, as he became the fastest head coach in franchise history and tied for 12th fastest in NHL history to do so.

5: Jake Gardiner has missed the Canes' last five games with an upper-body concern, but he practiced again with the team on Saturday. According to Brind'Amour, Gardiner "kind of gave us the thumbs up that he was 100 percent. He's an option for us tomorrow, probably game-time on that one."

4: Dougie Hamilton recorded two assists on Thursday against Detroit to extend his assist streak to four games. He leads the team in assists (15) and power-play assists (9) this season. Vincent Trocheck also posted a pair of assists on Thursday to extend his point streak to four games (2g, 3a). He leads the team with 21 points (12g, 9a) in 22 games this season.

The Opposition

Last five games: 3-0-2, 8 points

On the road: 8-1-1, 16 points

CAR vs. FLA: 2-0-1

Leading scorer: Jonathan Huberdeau, 28 points (10g, 18a) in 23 games

The Panthers are riding a five-game point streak (3-0-2) after consecutive victories in Nashville. Led by a hat trick from Noel Acciari, Florida completed its two-game sweep of the Predators with a 6-2 win on Saturday afternoon.

The Last Meeting

The Canes and Panthers last met just a week ago in Sunrise. The Canes took game one of the two-game set by a 4-3 score in the shootout, and two nights later, the Canes again claimed the extra point in a 3-2 overtime victory. Trocheck scored in both games in his first trip back to South Florida, while Martin Necas scored both the shootout-deciding goal and overtime-winning goal in either game.



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## Wolves can't solve Kivlenieks

Dominik Bokk's first North American goal nets lone score

Matiss Kivlenieks rejected 42 shots to backstop the Cleveland Monsters to a 3-1 victory over the Chicago Wolves on Saturday afternoon at the Wolves Training Facility in Hoffman Estates.

Rookie forward Dominik Bokk scored his first professional goal in North America to register the lone goal for the Wolves (8-2-0-1). Rookie goaltender Beck Warm (4-1-0), who signed an NHL contract with the Carolina Hurricanes earlier in the day, posted 31 saves and took his first pro loss.

Kivlenieks (3-0-0), coming off injured reserve with the NHL's Columbus Blue Jackets, earned two wins over the Wolves in a 22-hour span as he stopped 78 of 82 attempts.

"Disappointing," said Wolves head coach Ryan Warsofsky. "We had some stretches where we had some good energy and some good looks, but just not enough. You could see tonight that we were just a little off."

The Monsters (4-3-1-0) opened the scoring at 10:57 of the first when Trey Fix-Wolansky spied Adam Helewka open at

the far post and whistled a pass that Helewka redirected home.

Cleveland pushed its advantage to 2-0 at 12:40 of the first as rookie center Tyler Angle set up behind the net, found defenseman Dillon Simpson open on the doorstep and set him up for the tap-in.

The Wolves finally solved Kivlenieks with 2:16 left in the second. Elmhurst native Lukas Craggs flipped the puck through the neutral zone to Sean Malone, who zigzagged through the slot and drew all the attention. Malone then flipped a backhand pass to the back post for Bokk, who tapped it into the empty net to cut the lead to 2-1.

Cleveland rebuilt its two-goal margin at 4:24 of the third when Cliff Pu drew a faceoff back to Angle, who snapped a shot home with just six seconds left on the power play.

The Wolves travel to Des Moines to face the Iowa Wild at 6 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday. Chicago's next home game is slated for Saturday, March 27, against the Rockford IceHogs.

### TODAY'S LINKS

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<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/rest-is-a-weapon-for-the-can-es/c-322183652>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-florida-panthers-carolina-hurricanes/c-322188690>

<https://www.chicagowolves.com/2021/03/06/wolves-cant-solve-kivlenieks/>



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## SportScan

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

1205155 Florida Panthers

Noel Acciari's hat trick powers the red-hot Florida Panthers past Nashville Predators

BY WALTER VILLA MIAMI HERALD WRITER

MARCH 06, 2021 05:35 PM

Florida Panthers winger Grigory Denisenko can only dream of a career as successful as Aaron Ekblad.

Denisenko, a 20-year-old Russian and Florida's first-round pick in 2018, made his NHL debut Saturday as his Panthers routed the host Nashville Predators 6-2. Denisenko didn't register a point, but that didn't stop Florida from winning its second consecutive game.

No NHL team has fewer losses in regulation this season than the Panthers (15-4-4). Florida is also 8-1-1 away from home, which is the fewest losses in the league this year.

The Panthers on Saturday got three goals from Noel Acciari, one goal and one assist from Ekblad, a team-high 10th goal by Jonathan Huberdeau and a tally from Frank Vatrano.

Acciari, who scored 20 goals last season in his Panthers debut, had gone scoreless until Saturday. Prior to last season, he had never scored more than 10 goals.

Two of Acciari's goals Saturday came off of rebounds, and one was the first power-play tally of his career.

"I couldn't find my scoring touch, I guess, off of last season," Acciari said. "I loosened up."

This was Acciari's third career hat trick, all with the Panthers, earning him praise from Panthers coach Joel Quenneville.

"He either scores none or three," Quenneville joked. "He's been pressing a bit, but I don't care how many goals he scores. He does all the other things you want."

Sergei Bobrovsky made 28 saves Saturday, and the two goals he allowed were the direct result of faceoffs lost by the Panthers.

Bobrovsky escaped injury when he was tripped by Nashville's Filip Forsberg with 11:57 left in the third. Bobrovsky landed hard on his back, but he remained in the game after a brief delay.

As for Denisenko, he played 12:59, and he had two shots on goal, one hit and one blocked shot. He was also called for a tripping penalty that led to Nashville's first goal.

"For his first NHL game," Quenneville said, "I didn't mind him."

Longer term, the Panthers are looking for Denisenko to become an impact player. The last Panthers draft pick to make it big was Ekblad, who was the first overall selection in 2014. Ekblad leads all NHL defensemen this season with nine goals.

Since 2014, however, the Panthers haven't gotten much out of the draft. Henrik Borgstrom, Florida's highly touted first-rounder in 2016, is now playing in Finland. Owen Tippett, Florida's equally acclaimed first-rounder in 2017, was a healthy scratch on Saturday, which was perhaps a symbolic passing of the proverbial torch to Denisenko as the Panthers' next great hope.

However, Denisenko's first big play on Saturday was a negative one as he got sent to the penalty box for tripping Forsberg.

Nashville's power play clicked just seven seconds later as Ryan Johansen won the faceoff, and Forsberg passed the puck to Eeli Tolvanen, whose wrist shot from the left circle sailed past a completely screened Bobrovsky.

But after the Panthers were outshot 10-0 in the first portion of the opening period, Ekblad tied the score 1-1 with a shot past the glove of Predators goalie Pekka Rinne.

"[Ekblad] looks like top power forward at times," Quenneville said.

Panthers winger Patric Hornqvist said that goal was "huge" in terms of momentum.

That momentum showed just 75 seconds into the second period as Huberdeau got career goal No. 158, passing Scott Mellanby for third place on the Panthers' career list.

On his milestone goal, Huberdeau was in alone, scoring on his third move, lifting the puck over Renne's right pad from point-blank range. Hornqvist got the primary assist for the stretch pass that freed up Huberdeau.

"I felt I had to go blocker side," Huberdeau said.

Acciari scored the next two goals to put the Panthers up 4-1 after two periods.

The Predators cut their deficit to 4-2 just 19 seconds into the third period, but goals by Vatrano and Acciari iced the game.

THIS AND THAT

- Huberdeau and Aleksander Barkov have combined for seven goals and 17 points in Florida's first four games against Nashville this season.
- Anton Stralman, who suffered a lower-body injury in Florida's previous game, sat out. Kevin Connauton played in his place.
- Denisenko became the 15th player to make his Panthers debut this season, which is more newcomers than any other team in the league.
- Forward Vinnie Hinostroza was a healthy scratch, and defenseman Riley Stillman was sent to the taxi squad.

Miami Herald LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205156 Florida Panthers

Acciari nets hat trick for his first points of season as Panthers rally by Predators, retake share of Central lead



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## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

By TERESA M. WALKER

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAR 06, 2021 AT 6:11 PM

NASHVILLE, TENN. — The Florida Panthers are playing so well that someone who hadn't scored a point this season can turn in a hat trick.

The Nashville Predators couldn't be much more frustrated right now, struggling despite having so many key players who won a Presidents' Trophy just three seasons ago.

Noel Acciari scored three goals for his third career hat trick, and the Panthers beat the Nashville Predators 6-2 on Saturday for their second straight victory.

Acciari, who began the day with no points in 14 games this season, scored twice in a three-goal second period as the Panthers took the lead for good. He finished off the hat trick with an unassisted goal with 3:02 left.

"It's a great feeling," Acciari said. "I was just hoping to get one ... just to get my first of the season. But to get the other two was definitely exciting, and a lot of guys are putting pressure on me about tomorrow."

That's because the last time Acciari had a hat trick, he became the second in Florida history to turn in a hat trick in consecutive games on Dec. 16-20, 2019. Florida coach Joel Quenneville said the fourth-line forward either scores none or he scores three at a time.

"Pretty impressive," Quenneville said. "He gets flurries and nice to see him score. I think around the net he's been pressing a little bit. He doesn't get a ton of chances, but he's usually pretty nifty and tonight they were going in."

Aaron Ekblad, Jonathan Huberdeau and Frank Vatrano each had a goal and an assist as the Panthers improved to 8-1-1 on the road this season. Keith Yandle had two assists. Sergei Bobrovsky made 28 saves.

The Panthers, with 34 points in their 23 games, are tied atop the Central division with the 16-4-2 Tampa Bay Lightning.

Eeli Tolvanen and Viktor Arvidsson scored for Nashville, which lost its third straight and dropped to 1-9 combined against the Central Division's top three teams. Filip Forsberg had two assists, including the 200th of his career.

Nashville captain Roman Josi was so frustrated he nearly cursed talking to media after the game. He said the Predators have an identity for parts of games but not the full 60 minutes.

"We need to find a way to get out of this together," Josi said. "It's obviously not the way we want to play right now."

The Predators took the first 10 shots and didn't allow a Florida shot until midway through the first period. When Grigori Denisenko tripped Forsberg, the Predators scored 7 seconds into the man advantage with Tolvanen easily beating Bobrovsky with a slap shot to the far side of the net.

They appeared poised to take just their fourth lead after the first period this season until the final seconds. That's when Ekblad, coming off a four-point game, tied it with 12.6 seconds left in the first with a snap shot from the high slot at the right circle. It was all Panthers from there.

Huberdeau put the Panthers up 2-1 just 1:15 into the second with Patric Hornqvist getting his 500th career NHL point on the assist. Hornqvist got the puck in the Nashville offensive zone and passed to Huberdeau, who had enough time to deke out Rinne before flipping the puck over the goalie's right pad.

Acciari padded the lead at 11:17 of the second, finishing off a 2-on-1 with a wrist shot from the right circle. He got his second with 1:14 left in the period with a backhand past Rinne for a power-play goal.

### TOO LITTLE TOO LATE

Nashville came in tied for the NHL lead with 30 goals in the third period this season. Arvidsson made it 31 with a wrist shot in front 19 seconds into the third.

But the Predators couldn't put one past Bobrovsky the rest of the period. Vatrano got his eighth of the season before Acciari capped the scoring.

### ROAD WARRIORS

The Panthers already had the best road record through the first nine games in franchise history, and they won their fourth straight in Nashville. Florida also is 5-1-0 over the last six road games. Montreal is the only other NHL team with only one regulation road loss this season.

### DUCHENE OUT

Nashville center Matt Duchene was placed on injured reserve. He is expected to be sidelined for three to five weeks with a lower-body injury. The veteran has eight points in 23 games this season with a minus-11 rating.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205157 Florida Panthers

Acciari gets a hat trick and leads Panthers to win at Nashville

Published 11 hours ago on March 6, 2021

By George Richards

It took the Panthers a little while to get going Saturday afternoon at Nashville, but once they got their second cup of coffee, Florida got down to business.

And that business, at least lately in Nashville, has been about winning.

Florida won its fourth consecutive game at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena as they woke up from a first period malaise and eased its way to a 6-2 victory over the Predators.

"It was a dangerous game for us," Joel Quenneville said. "We thought it would be a tough one in the afternoon and I thought we responded as the game went along. The first 10 minutes we were not there, had a good finish with a goal and then a lot of good things happened."

The Panthers bounced back from a pair of OT/shootout losses to Carolina earlier in the week to sweep this two-game set from the Preds in regulation.

Florida gets back at it Sunday evening in Carolina at 5.

And, Noel Acciari will be looking to replicate the feat he accomplished last season when he scored a hat trick in back-to-back games.

"A lot of guys are putting a lot of pressure on my about tomorrow," he joked.

Acciari, who had no goals coming into Saturday, ended up getting his third hat trick on Saturday as he scored twice in the second period and then put the finishing touches on things in the third.

"It was a great feeling, I was just hoping to get one and get my first of the season," Acciari said. "To get two more, it is definitely exciting."



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The big news of the day came early when Florida announced it was activating rookie Grigori Denisenko from the taxi squad.

Denisenko, the Panthers' first-round pick in 2018, made his NHL debut and ended up with two shots on goal.

Down 1-0 on a power play goal (just the third the Florida penalty kill has surrendered on the road this season), the Panthers eventually sprung to life.

In the waning moments of the first period, Aaron Ekblad got his ninth goal of the season — which leads all NHL defensemen — to tie the score.

The Panthers kept up their wave of momentum in the second with Jonathan Huberdeau breaking loose off a stretch pass and freezing Rinne before going top-shelf.

That gave Florida a lead it would not surrender.

Midway through the period, Acciari got into the action, scoring his first goal of the season when he picked up the puck at center ice, stormed through the zone and went top shelf.

With 1:13 left in the second, he hopped on a rebound off a long shot from Keith Yandle and put it into the back of the net to give Florida a comfortable 4-1 lead going into the third.

Nashville came out flying in the third and cut the Panthers' lead to two goals just 19 seconds into the period.

But the Panthers kept their composure, kept coming at Rinne (26 saves) and ended up getting their three-goal lead back when Frank Vatrano salted the game away with five minutes left.

Acciari was not done, however, as he got his third hat trick with 3:02 left on the clock.

Sergei Bobrovsky was strong throughout the game but especially in the third period as he notched his second consecutive victory by making 28 saves.

### First period highlights

Early on, it was all Nashville as the Panthers slogged through the first half of the period.

Nashville led 1-0 on a power play goal from Eeli Tolvanen and were outshooting the Cats 10-0 before Barkov finally threw something toward Rinne.

Gustav Forsling had Florida's first real scoring chance of the period with 7:04 left with MacKenzie Weegar quickly following suit.

With 12.6 seconds left in the period, Ekblad scored on a nice wrist shot to tie the score heading into the second.

"That really changed the complexion of the game," Quenneville said. "We fed off of that going into the second."

On the stat sheet, Florida was outshot 12-9 with Nashville taking 21 shot attempts to Florida's 18.

"We showed some resilience out there, scoring a big goal at the end of the first and took over in the second," said Patric Hornqvist, who got his 500th NHL point with an assist on Huberdeau's goal in the second.

"Big effort from all 20 guys."

### Second period highlights

What a difference a period makes, eh?

After looking lost at the start of this game, the Panthers were flying high again in the second and scored three times to take a commanding 4-1 lead into the third.

Huberdeau got the fun going with Acciari scoring twice to put the finishing touches on a period the Panthers dominated.

"I was just trying not to grip the stick too tightly and get that first one," Acciari said. "Goals come in bunches sometimes and I got three tonight. Hopefully I can continue with that game and try to help the team either getting on the board or blocking a shot."

The Panthers threw up a ton of rubber in Rinne's direction, being credited for 11 shots and 21 shot attempts in the period.

Nashville looked like a defeated team as the period wore on as the Preds' season is quickly slipping away.

The Preds, who controlled the pace and flow of the game for the first 10-plus minutes, were in control of nothing in the second period.

Nashville was held to six SOG in the second period.

### Third period highlights

Quenneville said Friday that he knew Nashville would "take its turn" and it did so early in the third.

After winning a faceoff in the defensive zone, the Preds cut it to 4-2 just 19 seconds into the period on a goal from Viktor Arvidsson.

Nashville kept the pressure up, but the Panthers withstood it and got some good looks at Rinne throughout.

Midway through the period, Bobrovsky was upended by Filip Forsberg and he took a little extra time getting up and back in net.

Florida had a handful of big scoring chances on the power play with Ekblad being stopped twice on one-timers with Carter Verhaeghe also being denied.

The Panthers put the game on ice with 5:03 left when Vatrano scored off a feed from Barkov.

Acciari finally ended the scoring and was able to celebrate yet another hat trick.

"He either scores none or he scores three," Quenneville said. "He gets three at time three times and that's pretty impressive. Nice to see him score. He's been pressing a little bit around the net there. He doesn't get a ton of chances but he's pretty nifty. Tonight they were going on."

Florida Hockey Now LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205158 Florida Panthers

A GameDay Matinee in Nashville for Florida Panthers

Published 17 hours ago on March 6, 2021

By George Richards

The Florida Panthers had not started their games off in optimum ways before Thursday night in Nashville.

When Carter Verhaeghe scored 6:29 in, it was the first time in six games in which the Panthers scored first.

Florida would build up to a 3-0 lead en route to a 5-4 nail biter against a Predators team that does not seem to quit.

Well, at least against the Panthers.

The Panthers will try to win their fourth consecutive game and second this season at Bridgestone Arena when the two teams meet up for an afternoon kickoff at 2.



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For the best Florida Panthers coverage anywhere, subscribe to Florida Hockey Now today

Florida is 2-0-1 against Nashville this season with all three games decided by a goal.

In the first meeting on Feb. 4, the Panthers held a two-goal lead late in the third period before Nashville tied it up and eventually won in overtime. The next day, Florida won 2-1.

Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, who will start again Saturday, was on the ice for both of Nashville's comebacks.

He said Thursday night that goalies have "to have a short memory" and he didn't even recall what the Preds did the last time he faced them.

"I focus on one moment, one shot, one shift," said Bobrovsky, who made 31 saves on Thursday.

"I tried to read the game, they are aggressive and I had to fight the puck. I thought I did a pretty good job with those things."

Lineup changes for Nashville Matinee

Quenneville said defenseman Anton Stralman would not play Saturday afternoon in Nashville.

Stralman played the first two periods Thursday but did not come out for the third on Thursday.

With Stralman out, the Panthers will likely turn to either Riley Stillman or Kevin Connauton.

Although Markus Nutivaara is close to coming off IR, Quenneville did not think he would be ready to go on Saturday.

"We have a couple of guys we're thinking about," Quenneville said. "(Nutivaara) is close but I still don't think he's going tomorrow. We'll see about this trip. He's an option."

The Panthers were obviously thinking about Grigori Denisenko and Owen Tippett. Both players were activated from the taxi squad on Saturday morning.

— With Bobrovsky going Saturday, we can expect the Panthers to start Chris Driedger Sunday in Carolina.

Verhaeghe scores, Panthers win

Thursday's first-period goal gave Verhaeghe eight this season which ranks him tied for third (Sasha Barkov, Aaron Ekblad) on the team behind Jonathan Huberdeau and Patric Hornqvist for the team lead.

But it was his first since Feb. 11 against the Lightning — a drought of 10 consecutive games.

Friday, Verhaeghe said while it can be frustrating to get the chances and not the goals, he knew it would come eventually.

Naturally, living through that game after game can wear on a player.

"It's definitely a mental battle when you're shooting the puck and it's hitting the post or the goalie is getting a stick on it," Verhaeghe said.

"It can be tough upstairs, but it's just (part) of the ups-and-downs of a season. You just have to stick with it."

For the Panthers, when Verhaeghe scores, they do pretty well.

In their 14 wins this season, Verhaeghe has seven goals and 14 points; in eight losses, he has one goal and two points.

Special, special teams

Florida's special teams were excellent on Thursday night as the Panthers scored two goals on the power play while holding the Preds off the board when they had the advantage.

The only power play time Nashville had overlapped on back-to-back penalties on Juho Lammikko and Alex Wennberg.

Florida killed off the 5-on-3 which lasted 1:45 thanks to strong play in net from Bobrovsky as well as a couple of blocked shots from MacKenzie Weegar and Noel Acciari.

"They had a lot of time on the clock for that 5-on-3 so it was big-time, the guys made a lot of big blocks and allowed me to see the puck and I made the big saves there," said Bobrovsky, who made four saves on that power play chance as Florida held its 3-0 lead.

"It was a good moment at that time ... you never know how the game could go if they score there. Every moment is a big one."

Florida's penalty kill comes into the game ranked 18th in the league with a 78 percent success rate but a big reason why the Panthers are 7-1-1 away from home is their ability to kill off penalties.

The Panthers have the best road kill in the league (29 of 31 at 94%) and the worst at home (20 for 32 at 62.5%).

"This league there are a lot of special teams," Ekblad said. "Going down two men, you obviously need great goaltending and we got it there from Bob. You just have to protect the house, not let them see anything. ...

"I did not know about the road stat. That's great. A strong penalty kill is definitely something you want to take on the road."

The Nashville Panthers?

The Panthers are now 7-1-1 away from Sunrise this season, the best road record through nine games in franchise history.

Florida's three-game winning streak at Bridgestone Arena is its longest ever.

The Panthers were Nashville's first opponent in 1998 which was interesting since it had been rumored the team had eyes on relocating to Tennessee before securing an arena deal with Broward County in 1996.

With the Panthers staying in South Florida — and the Devils remaining in New Jersey — Nashville was granted an expansion team in 1997.

Florida won the first-ever game in Nashville, 1-0 on Oct. 10, 1998.

News, Notes & Numbers

Ekblad's two goals and two assists were a career-high as it was only his second two-goal game and the first time he had two power play goals in the same game.

It was the fifth time a Florida defenseman had two power play goals. The others: Robert Svehla, Brian Campbell, Sandis Ozolinsh and Bret Hedican.

Ekblad and Hedican are the only ones to accomplish it on the road.

Now with 28 power play goals, Ekblad has surpassed Svehla for the franchise lead by a defenseman.

Ekblad's four points also matched a franchise record for points in a regular-season game by a defenseman.

His seven goals leads all NHL defensemen this season.

— Barkov had three assists Thursday extending his point streak to four games (1-5-6).

He leads with team with 13 points (4-9-13) on the road.

— Huberdeau had a five-point night and his first NHL hat trick in the first meeting against the Preds this season.

Thursday, he had a goal and an assist giving him seven points (4-3, 7) in three games against Nashville this season.

Huberdeau also has seven points against Detroit this season but that is spread over six games.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

— The Panthers had 38 shots Thursday, their ninth consecutive game with at least 35 shots on goal.

Florida Panthers at Nashville Predators

When: Saturday, 2 p.m.

Where: Bridgestone Arena, Nashville

TV/Radio: FSF/560-AM

Records/Standings: Florida 14-4-4 (3rd in Central); Nashville 10-13-0 (6th)

All-time series: Florida leads 17-9-6 (3 ties)

Season series: Florida leads 2-1

Last season: Florida won both meetings (3-2, SO; 3-0)

Panthers this week — Monday: Carolina 3, Florida 2 (OT); Thursday: Panthers 5, Nashville 4; Saturday: Panthers at Nashville, 2; Sunday: Panthers at Carolina, 5

Florida Hockey Now LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205176 Nashville Predators

17 ways COVID-19 robbed sports in Tennessee: Would Jeremy Pruitt still be Vols' coach?

ADAM SPARKS | Nashville Tennessean

We'll never know what the past sports year in Tennessee would've been like if COVID-19 hadn't altered it.

Would Belmont basketball have made a run in the NCAA Tournament or Vanderbilt baseball repeated as national champions?

Would Jeremy Pruitt still be the Tennessee football coach? And what kind of buzz would've surrounded Nashville SC's inaugural season if not for COVID-19?

Here's what we missed in Tennessee sports over the past year because of COVID-19:

Possible job-saving wins for Pruitt

UT fired Pruitt for cause after a challenging 2020 season that featured SEC-only competition and multiple schedule changes. UT's original schedule probably would've led to a bowl bid with probable nonconference wins over Charlotte, Furman and Troy. Along with early SEC wins against Missouri and South Carolina, the Vols would've started 4-2 and finished the year with victories over Vanderbilt and Troy. Would that have dampened a UT internal investigation into recruiting violations? Perhaps. Firing a losing coach for allegedly cheating is easier than doing it after a second straight bowl appearance.

Buzz over Nashville SC inaugural season

Nashville SC picked the wrong year for its inaugural season in Major League Soccer. Sure, 59,069 fans came to its first match at Nissan Stadium in February to set an attendance record for a Tennessee soccer match. But the season was sidelined for five months early in the pandemic, and the team returned to strict attendance protocol. No fans were permitted at the next six matches. Nashville SC reached the conference semifinal, the second-best finish for an MLS expansion franchise in league history, but only 3,300 fans attended its only home playoff match.

Belmont basketball back in NCAA Tournament

Belmont beat Murray State 76-75 in a thrilling OVC championship game on March 7, 2020, to earn what would've been its ninth NCAA Tournament appearance. Five days later, the NCAA Tournament was canceled. Casey Alexander, succeeding Hall of Fame coach Rick Byrd, won 12 straight games to finish his debut season. But the Bruins didn't get to end it in the NCAA Tournament.

The best part of SEC basketball tournament

The top 10 seeds of the SEC Tournament hadn't played when COVID-19 canceled the event at Bridgestone Arena in March 2020. That meant Kentucky didn't get a chance to dethrone Auburn as the defending champion. And high seeds LSU, Mississippi State and Florida also never played. Combined, those three schools had won only one tournament title in the previous decade. Plus, a lot of talent never took the court in Nashville. Ten players picked in the 2020 NBA Draft were still in the bracket when it was canceled.

Vanderbilt baseball's national title defense

Vanderbilt won the 2019 NCAA championship in the College World Series, and it started a national title defense with promise. When the 2020 season was canceled, the Commodores were ranked No. 7 and about to start the SEC schedule. Austin Martin was already an all-time great. The lineup was young but talented. And the pitching staff had the potential to be historically elite. But many key players were drafted, and that title defense was put on hold until 2021 with a revamped roster.

High school basketball state titles

A lot of high school basketball dreams were left unfulfilled because the TSSAA state tournament was never finished. Macon County's girls could have won their first state title. Led by Class AA Miss Basketball Keely Carter, they had reached the semifinals when the tournament was stopped. And three Metro Nashville schools — East Nashville and Pearl-Cohn in Class AA and Hillsboro in Class AAA — reached the boys state tournament. Pearl-Cohn had its best team since it reached the semifinals in 1998 with Ron Slay and John Henderson on the roster.

Home games in two Predators seasons

The pandemic cost the Predators their final six home games in March last season. And they didn't return to Bridgestone Arena until Jan. 14, 2021, to start a 56-game shortened regular season. That's a span of 327 days since fans were allowed inside the arena for a home game. It was far from a memorable season otherwise, as the Predators finished fifth in the Central Division and failed to make the playoffs for the first time since 2013-14.

Completion of Kumar Rocker's second act

Vanderbilt pitcher Kumar Rocker was already a household name in college baseball. But he reached far beyond that in the summer of 2019. The freshman fireballer tossed the first no-hitter in NCAA Super Regional history, earned the College World Series MVP and rocketed to the top of the 2021 MLB Draft wish list. To start his sophomore season, Rocker struck out 28 of the 63 batters he faced before COVID-19 canceled the season. Fortunately, Vanderbilt gets him for one more season.

50,000 runners in Nashville marathon

The 2020 Rock 'n' Roll Nashville Marathon and Half Marathon held out hope of being run, but it never was. It was one of the first local events to be postponed, moving from April to November and putting about 50,000 runners on hold for a possible fall race. But it never happened. The 2020 race was canceled, and the 2021 race has been postponed to the fall.

Sounds baseball after 42 consecutive seasons

The Nashville Sounds never played a game in 2020. Judging from attendance at their first five seasons at First Horizon Park, that meant more than a half-million fans missed a trip to the city's Triple-A ballpark. It marked the first year since 1977 that Nashville did not have professional baseball.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

Robert Hassell III, prep stars' senior season

High school spring sports were canceled, leaving a lot of players without senior seasons. Among the most notable was Independence baseball player Robert Hassell III, a two-time Tennessee Gatorade Player of the Year. The area lost a promising talent because Hassell chose pro baseball over Vanderbilt, where he was committed. Hassell was picked No. 8 by the Padres, becoming the first position player from Middle Tennessee drafted in the first round out of high school since 1967.

Pomp of Marc Gasol's homecoming

Former Grizzlies great Marc Gasol was set to get a proper homecoming and a standing ovation from a sellout crowd at FedExForum in late March. But the NBA season was suspended 17 days before his Lakers were scheduled to come to Memphis. Gasol finally returned to FedExForum for a game in January and received a tribute video, but it was in front of a sparse crowd due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Music City Bowl pulling off a pandemic game

It looked like the TransPerfect Music City Bowl, against all odds, was going to be played between Missouri and Iowa in December. But four days before kickoff, the Missouri program was hit by an increase in COVID-19 cases, and it had to back out of the game. It was the first time the Music City Bowl had not been played since its inception in 1998.

Tennessee baseball's best chance at Omaha

It might've been the breakout season the Vols have been chasing. When the season stopped, UT had a 15-2 record and boasted one of the nation's best offensive lineups and pitching staffs. And ace Garrett Crochet had just returned to the mound. Could coach Tony Vitello have gotten the Vols to the College World Series for the first time since 2005? Maybe. The "what if" speculation grew even stronger when Crochet was pitching for the White Sox in September.

A single win for Vanderbilt football

Vanderbilt's original schedule included nonconference games against Mercer, Kansas State, Colorado State and Louisiana Tech. It's reasonable to think the Commodores would've won at least one of those games to avoid the first winless season in program history. But with an SEC-only schedule, they went 0-9, and Derek Mason was fired.

NASCAR Awards Show's return to Music City

The NASCAR Champions Week and NASCAR Cup Awards Banquet was a big hit in Nashville in 2019. It was scheduled to return to the Nashville Convention Center in December 2020, but the event was canceled. No worries, though. NASCAR plans to bring it back to Music City in 2021.

Kenneth Gainwell's encore in Memphis

Memphis running back Kenneth Gainwell was a breakout star in 2019, racking up more than 2,000 all-purpose yards and earning a national freshman of the year award. But his much-anticipated sophomore season never happened. Gainwell lost several family members to COVID-19, opted out of the 2020 season and declared for the NFL Draft.

Tennessean LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205177 Nashville Predators

How will COVID-19 impact roster makeover of Titans, Predators, Nashville SC? We asked the GMs

GENTRY ESTES | Nashville Tennessean

A year into all this, the socially distanced landscape of American pro sports in 2021 is nowhere close to the normal we once knew. Much has changed. Much will continue to change.

Except, of course, for this: The pressure to win.

That's not going anywhere.

The chaotic onset of COVID-19 — with quarantines and postponements — didn't ease expectations in locker rooms or front offices once games returned, and the pandemic won't be a viable excuse in the coming years, even as its fallout challenges teams and leagues for the foreseeable future.

The virus, hopefully, will be contained. But the financial impact on roster-building in pro sports is only just beginning, and the general managers of Nashville's three major franchises realize it.

This pandemic found Jon Robinson's Tennessee Titans (ascending recently), David Poile's Nashville Predators (descending recently) and Mike Jacobs' Nashville SC (still in its infancy) in varying spots competitively — but each will seek success in spite of a simple reality:

There's not going to be as much money available to pay players, and no one can know when that might return to normal.

Such is the inevitable consequence of empty seats at games.

"The reality for the clubs is there is virtually no revenues," said Poile from his NHL perch. "Any business, when you're dealing with that, you have to be careful."

Salary caps have typically increased annually, raising players' salaries with them. Not so anymore. The NHL and MLS are dealing with the likelihood of caps staying flat (with guaranteed deals already on the books). As Jacobs put it, "The challenge we have is to fit players into this jigsaw puzzle with wages that go up and the cap stays the same."

Meanwhile, the NFL's salary cap in 2021 is expected to decrease for the first time in 10 years.

Since pro football's lockout in 2011, its cap has gone up nearly \$80 million, reaching \$198.2 million in 2020. This year's cap is expected to be finalized in March. Teams were told in February it'd be no lower than \$180 million, which would still be a decrease of more than \$18 million.

"I would expect that there will be concessions, some downturn for everybody," Robinson said. "... The huge deals that have been going around the last two or three years, there may be a couple of cases where that continues to ring true, but I'd say for the most part there's probably going to have to be some trimming all the way across the board."

Titans: Bracing for a year like no other

My read on it: This offseason is going to be more eventful than any the NFL has experienced.

Robinson's response: "I don't disagree with that at all."

No exaggeration to suggest the coming months in the NFL could be wild with activity. The declining salary cap is going to have wide-ranging ramifications. It's going to force cost-cutting with current rosters. It's going to make it more difficult for teams to re-sign and retain current players — including some they'd opt to keep in a normal year — and stay under the cap.

But the flip side to that will be more options in a pool of free agents deeper than usual, and that, in turn, is going to create a buyer's market for teams unable to spend as much.

"Player X in a typical market year is going to make \$10 million; he's probably not going to make \$10 million," Robinson said. "He's probably going to make \$6-8 million."

To prepare for free agency, Robinson said in mid-February the Titans were working with "three or four different models" while waiting to learn what the salary cap would be.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

At that time, the website Spotrac.com had the Titans in the range of \$185 million in active 2021 contacts (over a potential cap of \$180 million). While not in great shape, the Titans weren't the New Orleans Saints, who were listed at a whopping \$258 million.

"There are some teams that certainly, if you look at the models, are going to have to hemorrhage quite a bit to make it work," Robinson said. "I think we're kind of in the middle, where we've got some work to do but feel like we've got a pretty good nucleus of players on the team, too."

Robinson said he expects free agency in 2021 to progress in multiple waves of player releases, and that could demand patience.

"When do you go all in and start to try to build your team?" he said, "You buy a (player) and then three weeks later somebody else becomes available and you're like, 'Well, damn, I would have liked to have had that guy.' It's going to be a big communication piece, just trying to have the pulse on what's going on."

Look for teams to prefer short-term deals in 2021.

Look, too, for teams to restructure existing player contracts. But Robinson cautioned, "You've got to be careful there, just continuing to kick the can down the road."

And that's the unique balancing act for teams — creating room to do business to improve your team without overleveraging an uncertain future.

"If the fans aren't back in the stands next fall," Robinson said, "then we're going to be looking at the same thing."

Predators: Roadblocks to a reset?

Here is the huge difference between what Robinson and Poile are facing:

The Titans can often release a player without owing the rest of a contract or taking a full salary cap hit.

The Predators, on the other hand, can't do that.

Player contracts are guaranteed in hockey, and for many NHL teams — including the Predators — that's a growing problem.

The NHL salary cap in 2020-21 stayed flat at \$81.5 million, the same number as the previous year.

The league has established some parameters that would allow the cap to increase in future years based on league-wide revenue. But this regular season was trimmed to 56 games and teams are still dealing with restrictions in crowd sizes, meaning that could take awhile.

"It looks like," Poile said, "based on the revenues that we don't presently have, we're going to have a flat cap going forward for the next couple of years. Which is going to make everybody have to be very careful in terms of what contracts they give out for the amount and, of course, for the length of contract."

The Predators are listed with a 2020-21 cap total of \$67.8 million. There's some room there, but you have to also consider what is on the books down the road.

This season's slow start suggested the Predators could be headed toward a roster rebuild. But the hurdles of the pandemic will make it difficult for any franchise to wipe the slate clean financially.

Predators forwards Ryan Johansen and Matt Duchene are each on the books for \$8 million in each of the next four years. Defensemen Roman Josi (\$9.06 million) and Ryan Ellis (\$6.25 million) are each signed through most of this decade. Viktor Arvidsson (\$4.25 million) has three more years left.

These deals were all finalized before the pandemic.

And once an NHL team signs a player to a long-term deal, it's basically stuck with him. Buyouts are difficult and expensive to execute. Trades

are tricky to pull off anyway to clear cap space and in hockey's current landscape, it'll be nearly impossible.

GMs, in many cases, will have hands tied.

"That's probably going to be the case," Poile said. "If you look at the salary cap and where almost every team is, probably the conversations would go something like this, 'I'm interested in player A for B, but there's a difference of \$1 million. If you can close that gap or make that equal, then maybe we have something to talk about. But if you can't, this trade is not going to happen.'"

Nashville SC: Sticking to the plan

A pandemic would seem the worse thing possible for an expansion team like Nashville SC. After only two MLS games, its season was halted for more than five months. When games did return, Nashville SC was playing in an empty Nissan Stadium.

Here's the thing, though: It was playing surprisingly well.

After being projected near the bottom of the league, Nashville was instead one of the biggest surprises of the 2020 MLS season, reaching the Eastern Conference semifinals before being eliminated by MLS Cup winner Columbus.

WHAT WE MISSED: 17 ways COVID-19 robbed sports in Tennessee: Would Jeremy Pruitt still be Vols' coach?

Here's another thing: The cautious building of Nashville's roster — given the uncertainty of what to expect from a new team — ended up helping with the uncertainty created by the pandemic. As a result, it "really didn't change our world tremendously," in terms of roster-building, Jacobs said.

In its first MLS season, Nashville SC leaned heavily on player contracts that carried team options for 2021 — and it has done so again for 2022.

"We accounted for the fact that with it being our first season that we felt we'd get a lot wrong," Jacobs said. "We had players who'd never played together, players we had not seen here yet. We wanted to have the flexibility as we headed into '21 that we could move away from a handful of guys that didn't work."

"I think we're really fortunate — whether it was (Coach) Gary Smith's tactics, the identification of the right players and how cohesive they were — we ended up bringing a large majority of those guys back because of the success the team had in 2020."

Team budgets for MLS salaries are set to increase in the coming years, but only incrementally (about \$310,000) from 2020 to 2021, according to a new collective bargaining agreement. Like in the NHL, most MLS player contracts are guaranteed. But unlike the NHL (and nearly every other sports league), there are varying labels and tiers that dictate salaries for players.

An enormously complicated system, it helps create parity in normal circumstances. It'll probably also insulate many teams from drastic upheaval now.

"Maybe where the pandemic affected us the most in regard to roster-building was the ability to have enough games to take inventory in the players that we have," Jacobs said. "... You have to have the conviction to be able to stick to your guns."

Tennessean LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205178 Nashville Predators

In Nashville, COVID-19 shuttered sports and paralyzed Lower Broadway

Adam Sparks, Nashville Tennessean



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

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Mike Gicz, a 34-year-old furloughed restaurant manager, crosses his fingers that his old laptop turns on.

Since Acme Feed & Seed restaurant temporarily closed a year ago, he's put off buying a new one. That complicates his side gigs of running his own small broadcast studio and searching for work as a DJ at socially distanced weddings for a few bucks while his hourly job is on hold.

Oddly, his troubles started when a basketball game was canceled.

Last March, the 2020 SEC Basketball Tournament at Bridgestone Arena was canceled. Tens of thousands of SEC fans skipped their annual trip to Nashville, and local businesses suffered immediately.

Acme, a staple for sports fans on Lower Broadway, shut its doors because, as owner Tom Morales said, "We can't survive on bachelorette parties. We need Predators and Titans games and big events (like the SEC Basketball Tournament) to stay open."

The SEC's projected revenue disappeared. The NCAA Tournament, which was scheduled to start the next week, was canceled for a loss of \$600 million.

The SEC Basketball Tournament started a chain reaction of cancellations at Bridgestone Arena, which continues to suffer financial losses a year later. Other Nashville teams stopped playing, and profitable sporting events were taken off the calendar.

Nashville suffered a \$4.5 billion decrease in visitor spending — \$7.5 billion in 2019 to \$3 billion in 2020 — because of COVID-19, according to the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. Much of those losses were because of attendance restrictions or cancellations of sporting events.

The financial effects of COVID-19 were felt from millionaire owners of pro franchises to furloughed restaurant workers.

"The layers of impact are overwhelming," Nashville Sports Council President/CEO Scott Ramsey said. "We had built this city into one of the great destinations for sports in the country. So everything was tied together."

When will sports fans flock to Nashville again?

Nashville as a red-hot, ultra-lucrative sports and tourism city will be back to pre-pandemic levels. It just may take until 2023, according to a forecast of hotel occupancy by research firm Tourism Economics, which was commissioned by the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.

"The second half of 2021 could give us the level of business to pay bills and hire employees back. And in 2022, I think we get much closer to normalcy," said Butch Spyridon, President/CEO of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. "The firm's forecast shows 2022 being slightly below 2019, and then 2023 getting back to 2019 levels."

However, about 5,000 hotel rooms and 60 restaurants were added to Nashville in 2020. That means profits could be diluted once tourism returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Spyridon knows that sounds daunting. But it's better than he felt a year ago when the SEC Basketball Tournament cancellation started an avalanche of financial shortfalls for Nashville sports.

"I was nauseous," Spyridon said. "But now I feel real good about our chances, our plan and the data we're looking at. But let's say I'm an optimistic realist because it's going to take time to bounce back."

How deep were financial cuts for Nashville sports?

Pro franchises, private universities, sports venues and the SEC declined to disclose the economic impact of COVID-19, but the losses were apparent.

The SEC Basketball Tournament, TransPerfect Music City Bowl and Rock 'n' Roll Nashville Marathon and Half Marathon were canceled in 2020. Spyridon said Nashville did not have event cancellation insurance for those events. The SEC said it had insurance, but it declined to disclose the details of the policy.

Nevertheless, the canceled events kept hundreds of thousands of visitors from the city.

The Nashville Predators didn't play a home game for 10 months. The Nashville Sounds canceled its season and lost projected sales from about 600,000 tickets for 70 home games.

The Tennessee Titans lost almost \$40 million in ticket sales, a projection based on average prices and attendance from the previous year, in addition to concessions, merchandise and other revenue that mostly dried up.

Nashville SC set a state attendance record for a soccer event with 59,069 in its inaugural MLS match on Feb. 29, 2020. Then the pandemic hit, and the club played in front of only 21,723 total the remainder of the 2020 season.

A crowd of almost 60,000 fans broke a soccer state attendance record for Nashville SC's inaugural MLS game on Feb. 29, 2020 at Nissan Stadium. Then COVID-19 came to Nashville, and attendance was drastically limited.

A crowd of almost 60,000 fans broke a soccer state attendance record for Nashville SC's inaugural MLS game on Feb. 29, 2020 at Nissan Stadium. Then COVID-19 came to Nashville, and attendance was drastically limited.

CHRISTOPHER HANEWINCKEL - USA TODAY SPORTS

Vanderbilt football home attendance dropped by more than 99% because only students and players' family members were allowed to attend games. Belmont, Lipscomb and Tennessee State basketball attendance permitted just a few hundred fans for home games.

The TSSAA, with its headquarters in Hermitage, took an \$809,046 loss in gross revenue in the 2019-20 school year with the cancelation of the high school state basketball tournaments and spring state championships.

And restaurants, bars, hotels and other small businesses that rely on revenue from patrons at those games took a deep financial plunge.

The recovery could be a long, hard road.

"You don't make up that revenue"

Lost revenue won't be recouped, and pro franchises have come to terms with that.

Instead — to tweak a March Madness phrase — they must survive and absorb.

COVID-19 changed sports forever. Here's how it changed us, too.

COVID-19 didn't just rob sports fans of the thrill of watching their favorite teams or sporting events. It robbed our intimate connections, too.

Students at John Overton High School share their experiences with virtual learning and what they have missed during the senior year as all Metro Nashville Public Schools students finally return to the classroom.

"You don't make up that revenue. It's gone," said Sean Henry, President/CEO of the Predators and Bridgestone Arena. "We'll get back to playing (fully attended) games. But we won't do double ticket sales or double food and beverage sales."

"It's shifted forward. But we'll get back to normal revenue next year (2021-22 season), or close to it, and even stronger the year after that (2022-23 season)."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

The Titans' regular season is scheduled to begin in September, when the pandemic should be more manageable or, perhaps, over. But like the Predators, they're not looking for ways to recoup revenue.

"To borrow a sports analogy, it's the next play," Titans President/CEO Burke Nihill said. "You don't look back at the last year and try to make it up."

The Predators and Titans still played games in 2020 and early 2021, allowed a small number of fans to attend and didn't furlough or lay off employees. Smaller franchises weren't so fortunate.

COVID-19 struck out Sounds beyond baseball games

Adam Nuse finished 2019 riding a rising tide of optimism. As Sounds general manager, he oversaw the third-highest home attendance average in minor league baseball.

Nuse also helped bring about 100 additional revenue-generating events besides baseball games to First Horizon Park, the most since the ballpark opened in 2015.

And he supervised the opening of Third & Home, a sports bar and restaurant overlooking the baseball field and located nicely in the booming Germantown area. Sounds co-owner Frank Ward also owns Third & Home, and some management staff overlaps.

Financially, it seemed like three home runs, as Nuse put it. But COVID-19 had other plans.

Sporting events: Strike one.

Large gatherings: Strike two.

And a restaurant: Strike three.

"All those industries were crushed," Nuse said. "Minor league baseball is a small business because we don't get big TV revenue, and we operate that way.

"Maybe we'll look back and give ourselves a high-five for surviving this and getting back to normal — maybe in 2022."

The Sounds plan to play a 2021 season, but attendance restrictions could vary throughout the season, which already has been delayed until May 4.

Good news ahead for Music City sports

But it will take longer for restaurants, hotels and their workers to rebound than pro franchises.

Morales, the owner of Acme, The Southern Steak & Oyster and Southernaire Market, furloughed about 300 employees. But thousands of other workers in the Nashville hospitality industry were laid off.

"I'm grateful that I worked for a company that was willing to pay for my health insurance for an entire year," Gicz said. "I have friends that were laid off and lost their insurance. They had medical issues and now they're up to their eyeballs in debt.

"So how quickly people come back from the pandemic varies."

Don't expect jobless fans to flood stadiums when the pandemic wanes. But the Titans, Predators and Nashville SC said their season-ticket renewal rate is almost 100%, and they haven't raised prices.

"We shouldn't be overly dramatic about where we sit," said Henry, about the stability of pro franchises. "It was a financial stagger. But people in our community are suffering real things."

But there's good news ahead.

The Titans and Predators said they recently hired new employees to expand their staff for a 2021 bounce-back. Construction on Nashville SC's 30,000-seat stadium remains on schedule to open in May 2022, according to CEO Ian Ayre.

After returning to a 2019 level in 2023, Nashville's hotel occupancy is projected to rise each year to a 27% increase by 2031.

And Nashville has a list of sporting events planned once COVID-19 subsides and restrictions loosen. An NCAA golf regional tournament will be played here in May. The Music City Grand Prix, an NTT IndyCar Series race, will debut in August.

The U.S. Figure Skating Championships will be at Bridgestone Arena in January 2022. The SEC Women's Basketball Tournament will be there in 2022 and the SEC Men's Basketball Tournament from 2023-35.

SEC Football Media Days will come to Nashville in 2023 with plans to expand as a fan experience event with elements of the NFL Draft, which was here in 2019.

"We'll build it back," Ramsey said. "We've got a pipeline of big things coming, and we're ready to go. It's just a matter of when Nashville gets the green light."

Tennessean LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205179 Nashville Predators

SEC Tournament's return reminds us we were wrong about COVID-19: 'Isn't going to last that long'

ADAM SPARKS | Nashville Tennessean

A small group of Kentucky basketball fans threw up their collective hands, yelled in anger at the huge videoboard hanging from the Bridgestone Arena roof and then walked out.

They didn't return. And they weren't allowed to, which was the source of their ire.

It was 9:14 p.m. on March 11, 2020. During halftime of the Arkansas-Vanderbilt game in the first round of the SEC Basketball Tournament, the public address announcer told the crowd that fans would not be allowed to attend the remainder of the event.

The message flashed across the videoboard, and fans booed.

How serious was COVID-19? And how on earth could it impact an American sporting event like that?

"I remember those massive boos," said Nashville Sports Council President/CEO Scott Ramsey, who knew of the announcement before almost anybody in the arena. "People were thinking, 'Come on, you're overreacting. This isn't going to last that long.'"

CANCELLATION DAY: Tennessee, Alabama and the harrowing day the SEC Tournament collapsed: 'I wanted to cry'

Those Kentucky fans, still frustrated by the sudden change of their basketball vacation, spilled onto Lower Broadway, where bright lights and lively music guided thousands toward restaurants, sports bars, shops and hotels.

Nashville still had the feel of a big event on the first day that COVID-19 impacted sports in Tennessee.

By the next morning, it was all over.

Day 2: Pro leagues told us COVID-19 was serious

On March 12, the SEC Tournament was canceled over concerns of COVID-19.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

Metro restrictions quickly impacted businesses anticipating a flood of paying customers who left the city or never arrived. By the end of 2020, Nashville suffered a \$4.5 billion decrease in visitor spending because of COVID-19.

**AT A STANDSTILL:** In Nashville, COVID-19 shuttered sports and paralyzed Lower Broadway

The SEC announcement wasn't a surprise. Other conferences already had canceled their basketball tournaments.

Fear had gripped the sports world after Utah Jazz player Rudy Gobert had tested positive for COVID-19 the day before, and pro leagues started halting their seasons on March 12.

At 10:42 a.m., MLS suspended its season. That delivered a major blow to Nashville SC, which had drawn a record crowd of 59,069 in its inaugural match on Feb. 29. Soccer was stopped for five months.

At 12:32 p.m., The Tennessean broke the news that the NHL would pause its season. The Predators, then in Toronto, returned to Bridgestone Arena, where fans wouldn't see them play in person for 327 days.

At 2:51 p.m., Minor League Baseball announced a delay to the start of the season. The Nashville Sounds searched for months for a way to play games at First Horizon Park. Instead, Nashville did not have professional baseball for the first time since 1977.

And then college, high school hoops stopped

At 2:17 p.m., the NCAA basketball tournament was canceled.

Three miles from Bridgestone Arena, the news jolted the Belmont basketball team. The Bruins had won the OVC Tournament title five days earlier to earn a bid that it would never get to use.

**BACK AGAIN?:** A year after COVID-19 robbed Belmont of NCAA Tournament, it has a chance to actually get there

At 3:07 p.m., the NCAA canceled the spring sports championships, including the College World Series.

That meant Vanderbilt baseball would not defend its 2019 national title. And Tennessee, perhaps with its best team in 15 years, also stopped its season just before the SEC schedule started.

At 7:32 p.m., the TSSAA suspended the girls state basketball tournament. Ultimately, the girls and boys tournaments were canceled, and the TSSAA took an \$809,046 loss in gross revenue in the 2019-20 school year.

Day 3: Football followed suit soon after

On the morning of March 13, the NFL sent a memo to all 32 teams to halt pre-draft visits. It was an early step in closing the doors on team facilities.

Later that day, the SEC announced a full shutdown of all sports — extending the stoppage from games to practices, meetings and all activities. That meant, effective at 3 p.m., spring football was stopped.

At 3:13 p.m., Tennessee athletics director Phillip Fulmer announced the Orange & White Spring Game was postponed. It was later canceled, and the 2020 SEC football schedule was altered.

**WHAT WE MISSED:** 17 ways COVID-19 robbed sports in Tennessee: Would Jeremy Pruitt still be Vols' coach?

The Vols and Vanderbilt missed out on playing winnable nonconference games because of COVID-19.

With more victories, would Jeremy Pruitt and Derek Mason have survived a surprise firing spree of SEC football coaches during the pandemic season? We'll never know.

But it added to the possible effects that COVID-19 had in a crazy sports year that was turned on its head in less than 48 hours in March 2020.

Tennessean LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205180 Nashville Predators

Florida Panthers 6, Nashville Predators 2: Matt Duchene on IR before third straight loss

PAUL SKRBINA | Nashville Tennessean

The Predators suffered another loss Saturday before trying to avoid their third loss in a row.

The team announced before the game that center Matt Duchene will miss three to five weeks with a lower-body injury. He joins defenseman Ryan Ellis, forward Luke Kunin and goalie Juuse Saros on injured reserve.

On the ice against the Florida Panthers, Duchene's injury meant the JoFA line of Ryan Johansen, Filip Forsberg and Viktor Arvidsson was reunited.

It didn't matter. The Panthers prevailed 6-2 at Bridgestone Arena.

Forsberg recorded his 23rd point in 24 games when he assisted on Eeli Tolvanen's power play goal 5:46 into the first period. It was his 200th career assist.

Tolvanen scored seven seconds into a power play, marking just the eighth time in 24 games the Predators have scored first.

It was the Predators' seventh shot on goal of the game, compared to none for the Panthers, who didn't get their first until 10:01 into the period.

The Panthers, though, scored the next four in a row.

Aaron Ekblad tied it with 12.6 seconds remaining in the first. Jonathan Huberdeau need just 1:15 into the second to put the visitors ahead 2-1. Former Predator Patric Hornqvist recorded his 500th career point on the play.

Noel Acciari pushed the Panthers' lead to 3-1 a little more than 10 minutes later, the first of his three goals. With 1:13 left in the second, Acciari recorded his second goal of the period and the season.

Arvidsson scored 19 seconds into the third period, his first goal since Jan. 30, a span of 15 games without one. Forsberg picked up an assist on the play.

The Predators fell to 10-14-0, while the Panthers improved to 15-4-4

Big number: 1-9. Predators record against the Panthers, Lightning and Hurricanes, the top three teams in the Central, this season. They beat the Panthers 6-5 in overtime Feb. 4.

On the wire: The Predators called up forward Mathieu Olivier and defenseman Alexandre Carrier from the taxi squad and reassigned forward Michael McCarron to the taxi squad. They also reassigned forward Tanner Jeannot to Chicago (AHL) from the taxi squad.

Tennessean LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205181 Nashville Predators

All his fault? Nashville Predators GM David Poile not blaming John Hynes for struggles



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 7, 2021

PAUL SKRBINA | Nashville Tennessean

Anger, disgust and embarrassment dripped from David Poile's face when tore through the Nashville Predators locker room at the Cotton Bowl 14 months ago.

The Nashville Predators general manger stared straight ahead as he walked through the litter of hockey sweaters and sweaty hockey players, each searching for answers after a loss to the Dallas Stars at the 2020 Winter Classic, in front 85,630 people at the Cotton Bowl and countless more on national television.

More than 1,500 miles away, John Hynes was home with family in New Jersey, not even a month after being fired by the Devils, unsure where, when or if his next head coaching job would come.

Five days later, in an un-Poile-like move, Peter Laviolette became the first coach fired in-season by the GM in more than 25 years. A day after that, Hynes had a new job.

That job has come with its challenges and its critics. The team technically missed the playoffs last season for the first time since 2013. They're struggling badly this season.

Poile, though, has been hesitant to place the blame on Hynes, even after another embarrassing loss to the Stars, 7-0 on Jan. 22, this time in front of no fans at Bridgestone Arena in what he called a turning point when the team became "very fragile very fast."

### Tough sledding

For one, Hynes had coached the team for just 65 days and 28 games before COVID-19 stopped the season in its tracks. Four months passed before the team lost its play-in series to the Coyotes. More than five months passed before the start of training camp this season, meaning in a year on the job, Hynes had not been around his players for more than nine months, hardly time to implement anything.

"I don't think so," Poile told The Tennessean when asked whether he could fairly assess Hynes' performance. "This is another situation where COVID, this pandemic has been hard for everyone, for his family in terms of integrating into the Nashville community.

"It's been a hard situation and just being normal in terms of when you get together with the players and the socialization you'd like to have with them, getting to know them. So no, that's not perfect."

### Struggles continue

The same can be said for this year's version of the Predators, who have lingered near the bottom of the Central Division standings and are threatening to extend their playoff-less streak to two years.

All of that could add up to being sellers before the April 12 trade deadline. Could add up to an overhaul of the roster and a rebuild.

Poile said if it came to that, and his bosses would have him, he would be around.

For now, it appears Hynes will be too, new faces or no.

Hynes said he has not interest in contemplating any of that. His players have

"We're focused on our team and trying to get better," he said. "As coaches and players, you're in it every day; you're working together, you're doing the right things. I believe we have a good group. It's about the guys who are here. We have to stay focused on the present."

It's Poile's job to worry about the future. Hynes was 26-23-1 with the Predators after going into Thursday's game against the Panthers. He was 150-159-45 with the Devils.

A rebuild could be an opportunity to bring in players who better suit Hynes' style. He was able to hire a couple of new assistant coaches before this season, but had little to do with the roster changes.

"Just like our team, it's a work in progress," Poile said. "John is a young coach and he's got some great ideas and he knows the game really well. ... It's a combination of a lot of things. There were a lot of player changes, coaching changes, all at the same time. We have to stabilize not only our team but stabilize the consistency in our play.

"Everybody's in a little bit of a situation where they've been affected by COVID. I can't think it's helped anybody."

### On the players

Poile has been quick to point out, this year and last, that a lot of the struggles have to do with the team's highly paid players not giving much of a return on the investment made in them.

He has singled out Ryan Johansen and his \$8 million per year cap hit. He's been critical of Matt Duchene, who carries the same hit but hasn't carried his weight since signing as a free agent before the 2019-20 season.

"Almost every question you've asked, it's the same (answer)," Poile said. "We have not performed as well as any of us had hoped.

"There's no question we have a lot of players in my mind that are underperforming right now. It should be at a higher level. ... We're all in this together and we're all, I guess, part of the problem. Hopefully we're all part of the solution."

Tennessean LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205147 Detroit Red Wings

Relish the history of the Detroit Red Wings' successes — and much more

Helene St. James

Detroit Free Press

What: "The Big 50: The Detroit Red Wings."

Author: Helene St. James, who has covered the Red Wings at the Detroit Free Press since 1996. Foreword by Chris Osgood, winner of three Stanley Cups as a Wings goaltender.

Publisher: Triumph Books.

Pages: 336 pages (paperback).

Price: \$16.95.

Availability: In leading bookstores and online from booksellers, including Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

About the book: "The Big 50" brings to life the men and moments that made the Red Wings such a dynamic and iconic franchise for nearly a century. The book features never-before-told stories about the greats such as Howe, Yzerman, Lidstrom and Lindsay, the near-greats beloved by fans and the great memories of Fight Night, the Fabulous Fifties, the Team for the Ages, the Grind Line, The Joe and much more.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 03.07.2021

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Red Wings' Alex Delvecchio got phone calls mid-game from 'hammered' owner about players

Bill Dow | Special to Detroit Free Press

As part of his series on former Detroit sports figures, Bill Dow caught up with Detroit Red Wings legend Alex Delvecchio.

How we remember him

The last Red Wing legend from the Original Six era became one of the game's greatest and most durable centerman, playing parts of 24 seasons (1951-73) for Detroit, the most in professional sports by a player who competed for one team in his career. Following Sid Abel's trade in 1952, Delvecchio frequently centered a new "Production Line" with Gordie Howe and Ted Lindsay. In his first four seasons, he helped the Wings capture three Stanley Cups and was the hero of Game 7 of the '55 Final when he scored two of Detroit's three goals.

Remarkably, he only missed 43 games due to injury, and in the process set a team record of 548 consecutive games played. The captain for the Wings from 1962 until his retirement in 1973 finished in the top 10 in NHL scoring 11 times, scored 20 or more goals in a season 13 times, appeared in 13 All-Star games, became the third player to amass 1,000 points, and won three Lady Byng trophies ('59, '66, '69) "for sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct combined with high playing ability." Throughout his career he was penalized 383 minutes and engaged in only a handful of fights. When he retired, Delvecchio was second in NHL history to Howe in games played, assists, and points. In 1974, he was awarded the prestigious Lester Patrick Award for his contributions to U.S. hockey, and three years later was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. His No. 10 jersey was retired by the Wings in 1991, and in 2008, the club unveiled a statue of him that now is in the concourse of Little Caesars Arena.

After his playing career

Near the end of his career in 1970, he established Alex Delvecchio Enterprises, a business that sold promotional items that later expanded to manufacture and engrave plaques and nameplates throughout North America.

In November 1973, general manager Ned Harkness convinced him to retire to become the head coach in the beginning of a perennial losing era sometimes referred to as the "Darkness with Harkness." He held the position for parts of four losing seasons and had added the title of GM in 1974 prior to his firing in 1977.

Today

Delvecchio, 89, lives in Oakland County with his wife, Judy. He has five children: Ken, Janice, Corrine, Alex Jr. and Lenny, 10 grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

On joining the Wings as a 19-year-old

"Being new to the game, I thought it was heaven joining that tremendous team with great players like Gordie, Ted Lindsay, Red Kelly, Marty Pavelich, and Terry Sawchuk. They all helped me and wanted to see me stick around. Early on, I played on a third line mostly with Johnny Wilson and Metro Prystai. We were lucky to get on the ice in the third period maybe two or three times unless we were way ahead or way behind. Our coach, Tommy Ivan, put us on the ice to give the big guys a break. He told us, 'just make sure the other team doesn't score.' We were more of a checking line. It really wasn't until sometime later when our center 'Dutch' Reibel broke his jaw that I got to play on the line with Gordie and Ted."

On developing into a player rarely penalized

"I was a bit of a hothead, was an aggressive player, and I got into some fights in junior hockey. My coach at Oshawa, Larry Aurie, instilled in me that I was better for the team on the ice than in the penalty box. Later Jack Adams (Wings GM) also said, 'you better stay on the ice or you are back in the minors.' That got my attention and I knew I had to change and mind my own business."

On his role as a centerman playmaker

"I had been brought up as a center in juniors and was trained to be a playmaker by passing to my wingers. During practice, Tommy Ivan had Gordie and Ted going down their wings and I had to pass to them so they could take their shots. I was always a pretty good passer and Tommy liked what I was doing. Bob Goldham (defenseman) used to always tell me, 'Alex, just get the puck to Gordie and let him deliver.' "

On playing in the shadow of Howe

"When I gave Gordie, Ted, and later Frank Mahovlich the puck and they scored, I recognized to myself that I did a lot of the work and I let them finish the play. Those guys were great to play with because when you gave them the puck, you knew something good was going to happen. Gordie was either going to score or disrupt their defense and then he could open it up for me or the other winger to have the opportunity to score. The magic number of goals back then was at least 20 per season, and I wanted to get mine too. I was never one to do a lot of the talking or bragging and I enjoyed setting the other guys up for goals. To me, it was just like if I was the one scoring."

On his durability

"I played with my head up, but either way, you're going to get injured and you have to learn to play through it. I remember one time in Toronto I was slashed and broke my thumb. The following day in Detroit I'm in the locker room for the next game and I have a cast on my hand. Jack Adams (GM) comes in and says, 'why the hell are you in here and not warming up?' I said, 'I have a broken thumb.' He said, 'bullshit, take that thing off.' So the trainer took pliers, cut the cast off and I played. Back then you would play hurt because you didn't want to lose your job."

On Jack Adams trading 8 players after winning 1955 Stanley Cup

"Jack Adams really broke up that team and the guys we traded were really good players. We all wondered 'what the hell is going on here?' Had he not done that we all felt we would have won more Cups. When the trades happened, I looked to see if my name was on the list. When I first came up my goal was to play 10 years because that's when you get your full pension. I always rented a house because my teammates always said don't get too tied up because you never knew what Adams might do. I don't think I bought a home until 1964. Adams use to follow us to all the games and sometimes he would sit at the end of the bench. I remember Benny Woit had been deked by a Montreal player who scored. I was on the bench sitting near Jack and he asked me, 'who let that happen?' I said, 'I don't know and he said 'you're full of shit.' I wasn't going to hang Benny. To hell with Adams, I wasn't going to tell him. He was later traded. Jack was a real tyrant. Gordie liked to shorten his sticks and at practice Adams would sometimes go onto the ice and throw Gordie's stick into the stands because he thought it was too short."

On breaking the record in '68-69 for most goals by a line in a season (118)

"Frank Mahovlich really made the difference for Gordie and me. When Frank played for Toronto, the word was, 'don't touch him, let him be and he won't do any harm.' If you hit him it woke him up and he was a threat. It was the same thing in Detroit. Sometimes I would send him a sucker pass. He would get hit and hopefully it woke him up. We were a very well-balanced line and playing with them was a real joy. You could always give Gordie and Frank the puck and things would happen."

On playing for Ned Harkness toward the end of his career

"Ned was out of his class trying to coach in the NHL. He even insisted that I stop smoking cigars. He was a college coach. At our first practice,



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he told Gordie and me that he wanted us to skate over to him when he blew his whistle and for us to ask him some questions in front of the team. Gordie and I got together and said to hell with that. He blew his whistle but we didn't ask him any questions and he gave us a few cuss words. When he became general manager, he got rid of some of our good players like Garry Unger, Frank, and Pete Stenkowski. I felt kind of sorry for him. He should have stayed in college hockey."

On being coach and GM for Wings

"I took the job as coach because I had been here for so long and thought I could straighten the Wings out. I was given the opportunity and gave it a try but not everyone is built to be a coach or general manager. Apparently I wasn't it. It's a tough job but you have to have the players and we didn't have enough good ones. We had a lot of interference from Bruce Norris (owner) and John Ziegler (team attorney) and they made a lot of the calls. Bruce would be up in his box half hammered and would phone down to the bench and say, things like, 'don't play that guy anymore.' How in the hell are you going to coach or manage with that kind of interference? It was very frustrating but I'm not blaming them. They did give me a chance, it never panned out, and that's the way it goes."

On the Wings today

"I still follow the Red Wings and I think Stevie (Yzerman, GM) will do a great job if they leave him alone. He's really starting from scratch."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205149 Detroit Red Wings

Filip Zadina scores twice, but Red Wings drop third in row

Updated Mar 04, 2021; Posted Mar 04, 2021

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mive.com

could not protect it.

The Carolina Hurricanes scored twice in a span of 2:05 early in the third period to snap a tie and went on to defeat Detroit 5-2 at PNC Arena.

The Red Wings (7-16-3) have lost three in a row after winning the first game of a road trip. They begin a six-game homestand Tuesday against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Jordan Staal had a goal and an assist and was among seven players with multiple points for Carolina (16-6-1). Alex Nedeljkovic made 33 saves.

Staal scored 45 seconds into the third period to give Carolina a 3-2 lead. He fired in the rebound of a shot that hit Jesper Fast in front of the net.

Fast then scored at 2:50 to add to the lead.

Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill pulled goaltender Jonathan Bernier for the extra skater with 5:15 remaining. It took only 10 seconds for Nino Niederreiter to score into an empty net and seal the outcome.

The game marked the first time brothers Evgeny and Andrei Svechnikov played against each other. Carolina's Andrei had a goal and an assist while older brother Evgeny picked up an assist to give him four points (two goals, two assists) in four games since making his Red Wings season debut on Saturday.

Zadina opened the scoring at 10:54 of the first period, taking a pass from Sam Gagner and firing in a shot from the face-off circle after a Carolina turnover in its own zone.

Andrei Svechnikov answered just 21 seconds later, snapping a hard shot past Bernier just six seconds into a power play.

Zadina put his team ahead 2-1 at 7:35 of the second period by firing in a loose puck from the right face-off circle on the power play. He had gone 11 games without goal. He has three goals in 19 games this season.

The Red Wings registered 11 shots on the power play and have scored on the man-advantage in four consecutive games following a 0 for 40 drought.

But Martin Necas tied it at 18:45 of the second by firing the puck through a screen from the high slot. That goal seemed to give the Hurricanes momentum heading into the third period.

Michigan Live LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205271 Websites

The Athletic / What has the NHL done about diversity since George Floyd's death? A conversation with Kim Davis

By Ryan S. Clark and Sean Shapiro

Mar 6, 2021

Go about three miles west of Enterprise Center in St. Louis and you will find Cardinal Ritter College Prep — a predominantly Black Catholic preparatory school that was founded in 1979 and boasts a 100-percent college acceptance rate for its students.

You'll also find Cardinal Ritter seniors Gabrielle James and Jalen Prince. They are the first recipients of a scholarship created in February by the St. Louis Blues. The goal of the initiative is to encourage diversity and inclusion within the sports and entertainment industry. James and Prince will have a season-long paid internship with the Blues while also having the remainder of their tuition covered. They will receive an opportunity to learn, while also taking an active role in planning and executing Hockey is for Everyone night and Cardinal Ritter College Prep night when the Blues host the Minnesota Wild in April for a two-game series.

Last summer, the NHL faced a reckoning about race, racism and an overall lack of diversity in professional hockey. The conversations had been there before, such as when Akim Aliu openly discussed the racial abuse he faced in the AHL. But it was George Floyd's death last May that led to many players — more specifically, White players — publicly discussing the issue for the first time. Soon after, Mathew Dumba made league history by, after giving an impassioned speech about fighting racism, becoming the first player to kneel during the national anthem. It was a moment that resonated, but the league and its players faced criticism in August when multiple professional leagues postponed games while the NHL kept playing in the aftermath of Kenosha, Wis., police shooting Jacob Blake seven times. Days later, the league had several of its players come together to support those such as Colorado Avalanche duo Pierre-Edouard Bellemare and Nazem Kadri in addition to Vegas Golden Knights winger Ryan Reaves.

Floyd's death and the ensuing protests also resulted in nearly every NHL team issuing a statement regarding how they would play a part in addressing racism. The NHL instituted an executive inclusion council (EIC), chaired by commissioner Gary Bettman and Buffalo Sabres owner Kim Pegula. "The EIC is meeting regularly to measure our current state; develop sweeping strategies to involve, value and empower through inclusion," the NHL said.

In February, The Athletic asked the NHL and each of the league's 31 clubs for details on what they have done in the months since those



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statements were released and initiatives, such as the EIC, were launched. The NHL responded with data collected in a survey conducted by the EIC in November.

Some of the key highlights:

59 percent of teams reported building participation programs among BIPOC youth.

72 percent of teams have established or stated they will establish a diversity and inclusion council.

50 percent of teams have engaged, or have committed to engaging, third-party organizations to facilitate D&I training.

In addition, nearly half of the NHL's teams offered additional insight into what they have done. The Blues launched the scholarship program at Cardinal Ritter. The Nashville Predators created a long-term program with Tennessee State, a Historically Black College and University, for a scholarship fund. Meanwhile, the Vegas Golden Knights strengthened their relationship with the Las Vegas chapter of the NAACP and partnered with a local Boys and Girls Club to create an environment where youth can play ball hockey. A summary of actions taken by the teams who volunteered information is available [here](#).

While the NHL's data show a growing commitment to diversity and inclusion across the league, the numbers also reveal a significant number of teams that have yet to take action. The Athletic requested to speak with Bettman and NHL executive vice-president for social impact, growth initiatives and legislative affairs Kim Davis about these efforts. The NHL said Bettman preferred for Davis to speak about these issues on behalf of the league.

Davis said that the specificity of questions to NHL teams is why there wasn't 100 percent "yes" answers in the categories. Davis said the league specifically asked teams questions such as, "have you developed youth programs with specific and intended outcomes focused on BIPOC kids?"

"The executive inclusion council has said specifically that as we look at youth programming we need to be clear at the onset of what outcomes we are looking to achieve and how we are going to measure those outcomes," Davis said. "So you can have a youth program that is focused on building a welcoming environment. You can have a youth program that's focused on removing the barriers of infrastructure and equipment costs. You can have a youth program that's focused on building a pipeline of elite talent, like the program that Pittsburgh just announced.

"So I think we have to make sure that clubs are looking at youth programming and not just saying, 'this is great, we are gonna get kids skates and that's wonderful,' but there have to be glide paths and on-ramps. If you have a Learn To Play program, there needs to be a connection to how does that on-ramp you to a travel program? How does that get you to an elite pathway?"

Davis said teams are "digging deeply" on that front now and that the league has developed a framework focusing on seven dimensions of best practices: leadership, education, employment, marketing, partnerships, participation, and community and civic engagement. She said the NHL has benchmarks it plans to measure in a year and that she expects all 31 NHL teams to have established a diversity and inclusion council within the year and in her conversations with each team she hadn't received any resistance. "I think it's just a question of getting the structures in place and starting them in a meaningful way," she said.

Here is our full conversation with Davis, which has been edited for length and clarity.

We know the NHL has been working on diversity and inclusion for quite some time, but how do you and the league go about convincing people that this is something all of you are in for the long haul? It's not just a reaction predicated off of what happened last summer, when there was an international discussion about race and racism?

This question is asked of me all the time. And my answer is consistent. I really think that 2020 was an acceleration for us. I've been here three years now and almost immediately when I joined and started working on this, and just for background and you may not know this, the way we started this was when I joined the league in December, soon after we put a white paper together and it's durable, actually the white paper is still durable today, I can send it to you. It's something we co-authored with William Frey, who's the lead demographer at the Brookings Institute and an old friend.

And we did the piece on the demographic shifts in North America and the implications on the sport of hockey. And that piece talked about how demographics were shifting, how 23, at that time, of our 31 clubs were already in markets where the notion of minority was a misnomer — minorities represent a majority for millennials and gen-Zers — and that was something if we were going to think about the future growth of our sport, not through a philanthropic lens, but through a growth lens and fandom development lens, that we needed to think differently.

And I took that report on the road and I went out and visited every one of our clubs. I think I didn't get to two clubs, and I sat down with owners and presidents and CMOs from those clubs and we talked about it the same way we talk about any other business problem to solve. And that set the tone for the beginning of moving in that direction. So by the time our pandemic hit, as I call it both the racial pandemic and the health pandemic, we were well on our way. But, for sure, it was an acceleration point. People were still, they were able to start learning and listening and thinking in different ways. If the game had been in play, I have no doubt that it would not have been as accelerated as it was.

But I think the framework that we've put in place, which we are using for a baseline — these seven dimensions of best practices that we've talked about — allows the clubs to have a way to measure themselves and allows us to measure them, but it also allows the flexibility of every market and every team to do it in the way that makes sense for their business and their market. I think it's that mass customization that I think is gonna really help us move the needle on this stuff.

Going back to last summer, there were statements made by NHL teams in regards to George Floyd's death. What role did the NHL play in helping teams craft statements, and were there teams that sought assistance from the league in that regard?

Yeah, look, one of the things if you are really into this work for the long haul and you look at it and the way you solve any other problem, it's a new muscle for a lot of our clubs. So it's our responsibility, I think, we have the core competence sitting at the league level to support our clubs.

So, yes, we had clubs reach out to us. And I have positioned myself with the clubs and the owners almost like a consultant to the clubs, right? My job is to bring my expertise to them and help them frame these issues. It wasn't like they were starting from whole cloth, but they would run their language by us and make sure the language was appropriate.

Because you know how the media is, they take a crack at every little chink in the armor. And so one of the reasons people often aren't authentic in these conversations is because they are afraid to say the wrong thing. It's not necessarily that their intentions are bad, they just don't know. And so I think it's our responsibility collectively to cut people some slack and make sure we are using the language that shows intention. And, yeah, we did that.

It feels like every company is having conversations with BIPOC employees. Is this something the NHL has done where there's been maybe something like a Zoom call or a conference call where those conversations have been had? And if so, what's been the process of those discussions? And what has been the takeaway? We know that's a wide-ranging question.

It's not wide-ranging, it's appropriate. You have to make sure that you are providing the same support to your own employees that you are providing to your clients — I think of the clubs as our clients. Early in 2020, in the pandemic, I think it was around April or May we had two



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town hall meetings with NHL employees focused on race and race relations and anti-racism. And the first one was more about setting the frame of what this whole pandemic meant and what the race implications were, and what we needed to do inside our own walls.

And then the second one was an opportunity for storytelling. Giving employees opportunities to tell their stories, Black and BIPOC employees who volunteered to talk about their lived experience as Black and BIPOC folks. And that experience within the NHL.

It opened us up to a couple of things. One is we opened up an ability for employees to provide anonymous feedback to the league on any issues, any employee could do that. And I think that's been both refreshing and empowering for our employees. We set forth a number of employee resource groups, which had never occurred at the NHL, so we now have ERGs for our employees.

Prior to all of this work, we had formulated an internal steering committee that focuses on diversity and inclusion. Heidi Browning and I co-lead that, made up of employees across the league. So I think if you look at what we are doing within the league, it constitutes the same type of best practices you are seeing across corporate America.

(Note: At this point, NHL senior vice-president of communications John Dellapina interjected that NHL commissioner Gary Bettman had been involved in these town halls.)

And people are asking the hard questions. I can tell you this is not playtime. People are not holding back. I think what John just said is really important to illuminate, the reason in our seven dimensions of strategic areas of excellence, the first thing is leadership for a reason.

I have said for 30 years in this work that companies that have made substantial long-term change in this work, the CEO is the chief diversity officer, right? That the CEO makes accountability, holds him or herself accountable, they lead the way. That's the same conversation I've had with every president and CEO of our 32 clubs, because Seattle has been completely involved in this work. And John is right, Gary has not only been an amazing leader in this effort, but he's been a sponsor of my having access in a way that when I come out and talk to them, and I talk to owners, that I'm representing Gary's voice and not just Kim's voice.

To follow up on that, what does commissioner Bettman's passion on this look like to you?

It's so funny and Gary and I talk about this all the time and we debate it all the time. When I first joined the league and we talked broadly about changing demographics and growth and what that should mean for the league, Gary always talked about it being the right thing to do.

And he's never wavered on that and he's consistent about that. And he absolutely gets the growth element of it. He's the voice of this being the right thing to do because of the kind of value we say we stand for as a sport.

And I'm the voice of this is about growth, this is about demographic shifts. This is not emotional, this is really about making more money and growing our fanbase and making our sport safer and welcoming. So I think he and I have absolutely converged those two ideas, but his real passion, if I have to say, really sits around this being the centerpiece of the values of our sport. And he often says it's a privilege for us to be in a business where we are bringing sports to fans and in doing that we ought to have a responsibility and an obligation to ensure that we are doing the right thing. And that this is something that creates the right culture, so that's how I would describe his passion.

What steps has the NHL taken in hiring more BIPOC in roles behind the scenes, and could the league look at instituting something similar to the Rooney Rule in the NFL when it comes to specific jobs like that?

I'm not a big proponent of the Rooney Rule, because it has not worked for football. We talk a lot about that. I sit on the RISE (Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality) board with all of the other sports leagues and we talk very openly about it. What I will say is that I think having run talent for big

organizations like JP Morgan, you have to have a framework and a structure. I think in our sport understanding where the gaps are is the first step. We are now preparing to undertake a league-wide demographics study so that we understand exactly where our opportunities are. It is not just understanding race, ethnicity and gender.

It is understanding where does all of that sit relative to different parts of the organization. So, do most of our women sit in traditional — as the market calls — pink suite groups like HR? Are we over-indexed in hockey operations with White males, which we already know we are. Again, much like the seven-point framework, it is the same thing in employment: If you don't know where you are and where the problems are, then you aren't going to be able to put a reasonable strategy in place. That is about to be launched and we expect to have that done during 2021. This is bigger than (The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport) report and far more detailed. We have been using (TIDES director Dr. Richard) Lapchick as a consultant to help us as we frame this.

What's going to be important for example, in the area of coaching, we know we have a different problem than the NFL. We don't even have a pipeline of talent to pool from. A year ago, we partnered with the NHL Coaching Association to develop a BIPOC coaching program, a development program, so we could then be identifying through NCAAs, private schools, hockey coaches, folks that could end up ultimately being coaches in the NHL and we start developing them. That program commenced last June. We identified 15 Black coaches and they have gone through that program. Now they are being mentored and sponsored throughout the network. I believe with the game the intentionality around those folks that over the next five-to-10 years, you are going to see those people move into roles.

I think Brett Petersen is an example of that. He was part of that program. Obviously, he's been in the network a long time. He brings versatility and diversity of background. We all know it is more than just that. Are you in the network? Are you in the informal network? Do you have exposure to the decision-makers? I have come to learn in my three years that it is more pronounced in the sport of hockey. You've got to be in that network. That is a deep example of one area where I think we are seeing some impact around. And just people feeling like we've got a focus on this is changing how people in the hockey ecosystem are thinking about diversity and inclusion.

Willie O'Ree

(Stephen R. Sylvania / USA Today)

We had a few questions about the league and Willie O'Ree. What made the league decide this was the time to honor him with the helmet decal as opposed to doing something like this earlier? Also, when it came to the Boston Bruins' decision to retire his number, is that a conversation the Bruins have with the NHL, the NHL have with the Bruins or how would something like this work? What was the backstory?

Let me start backwards with that. (Bruins president Cam Neely) let Gary and I know at the same time and he sent us a note that the Bruins made a decision (to retire O'Ree's number). The NHL had no decision as part of them making that ultimate decision to retire his number. Of course with COVID, it is just an odd time to try to do something like that. And as you know, the decision was made to delay the actual ceremony until next year. If you look at when Willie's 60th was celebrated with the Bruins and that was two months after I joined the league and I was in Boston for that.

Willie is beloved. Not as a Black player, but as a player. The opportunity to have him in the stadium and he couldn't travel. Willie is 84 years old. He just had his second COVID shot last week. That was a Bruins' decision and we support it 100 percent and we're going to bring assets to help them, but it is fully their decision as to how they are curating that event. I've been here for three years and Willie has been top of mind with everything that we have done. It's not odd that we would decide to create helmet decals for him because we are doing everything. The Willie movie. The 60th anniversary. Willie is the centerpiece of so much that we do and we've done because he has brought so much to the sport in



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terms of 'Hockey is for Everyone.' This was a unique moment because Willie's anniversary coincides for the first time with Martin Luther King Day. We were looking to do something that would be unique to bring forth and that is how the helmet decal idea came up specifically. It was born out of this idea that we stand at a unique moment where we stand at the intersection of Willie's anniversary with MLK Day. What can we do that is going to be enduring that we can launch on that day and continue through Black History Month and beyond. That's where the decal idea came up.

That said, what discussions have been held about retiring Willie O'Ree's number throughout the NHL and if that was ever done, could we see something similar to what Major League Baseball has done with Jackie Robinson Day in which everyone across the league wears No. 42? Could we see the same thing with Willie O'Ree?

We've heard it. People have raised it. We've seen it more on social media than anything. You guys know there would be a lot of considerations around that including are there other No. 22's on other teams that have already been retired. I think there is a lot that would go into making that decision. But I don't think it is absolutely not outside the realm of possibility given his contribution to the sport.

As far as the Executive Inclusion Council, what was the criteria used to determine who would be the best selections for that group?

Gary sent a note out to all of the governors indicating that we were going to be starting this. He first asked for volunteers. I would say the majority of the folks that are on the council stepped up. Then, we looked at those names and we wanted to make sure that the council represented all the voices we were looking to represent as part of the journey. Of course when we looked at the council, we saw that the BIPOC representation – as you would imagine – would be light.

The first thing that happened was (Washington Capitals owner) Ted Leonsis, who has stepped up to be on the council, called Gary to say he would like to have Earl Stafford, who is one of the minority owners of the Caps, represent the Caps on the council. That was fabulous. Earl has become a great friend and he has been very, very involved in our work. Earl joined. I then suggested that (Minnesota Wild team physician) Dr. Joel Boyd be part of it. Joel has also been a great supporter. His knowledge of hockey, not just from a medical perspective but as you know two of his kids work in Seattle (for the Kraken). He was an appropriate candidate. Then, we looked at the makeup and realized we did not have any Indigenous representation and we reached out to Ted Nolan, who we had originally expected would be part of the (Player Inclusion Council). We wanted his voice elevated to the EIC level. So, Ted rounded that group out. For the most part, the membership was made up of people who stepped up and said they wanted to take leadership.

What has the NHL communicated to its teams about what success looks like on this issue a year from now?

We haven't talked about it in terms of a year from now. We've talked about this in terms of the work over the next three-to-five years with benchmarks along the way. We've outlined these seven dimensions of excellence starting with leadership, education, employment, marketing, partnerships, participation, and community and civic engagement. Those are the seven levers we believe are going to be important for every club to look at and to pull. These aren't sequential. It's an integrated, interwoven strategy.

We've said that leadership, there is something important about starting with the first three even though you may have things going on in the next four. It's making sure your foundation is secure and we consider the first three to be foundational. Leadership, establishing a council and having new voices around the decision-making table. We've said in the next year, we expect and hope that 100 percent of the clubs will have that. As I said at the beginning of the conversation, I doubt that we will have any trouble achieving that. Education – using a third party to come in and do anti-racist, anti-bias training and having that complete by the end of the 2022 season is the benchmark we have put in place around that.

And then employment, there are two dimensions to that. The first important dimension is the demographic study, which we expect to have that underway and completed by the end of the year. Again, you can't know how to set targets until you know what your baseline is. And so the second half of that really begins to into operationalizing and starting to set specific targets around hiring in front office roles. We think that over the next year the leadership and the education pieces are going to be the levers that the clubs are going to pull. That is what we expect to see when we do our survey next December, which will measure where we are relative to the baseline we established in December.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205272 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers fought, scored their way out of slump in comeback win vs. Flames

Mark Spector

March 7, 2021, 2:18 AM

EDMONTON — These are the wins that separate.

The games where you don't score first. Where your lines at the start of the game and your lines at the end of the game aren't the same.

Where the team that just got its coach fired is doing everything in the opening period — hitting, hustling, sacrificing — that it never did for the old coach, and you just have to survive the push and deal with a 1-0 deficit.

Goaltender Mike Smith let us inside the program a little bit in his post-game comments on Saturday, after a healthy, hard-won 3-2 regulation win over the Calgary Flames. It was the tourniquet that stopped the bleeding of a three-game slaughter at the hands of the Toronto Maple Leafs, the kind of medicine that helps get the patient off the table.

"Something that's been talked about in our locker room the last few days is, how do we win games when it's not easy?" began Smith. "How do you win games when things don't go as planned? You get down, or there is some adversity. That's something we've been talking about, and trying to learn from."

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The team with the new coach — even though Darryl Sutter was at home in Viking watching the game on TV due to COVID-19 protocols — always wins this game. And sure enough, the Flames out-hit and outplayed Edmonton in the first period, frustrating Leon Draisaitl into two retaliatory penalties and scoring on the power play provided by Kailer Yamamoto's slew foot.

"We didn't have the first period we wanted to," Smith said. "But that didn't deter us from going out in the second and third and building a game. Finding a way to win even though we were down. It's a good lesson learned for our group, because it's going to get harder and harder as the season goes on. As you get closer to playoffs and in the playoffs."

Smith gave them the requisite goaltending to build a comeback around. It never got to 2-0, and even when the Flames made it 2-1 early in Period 3, Smith made sure the Flames never scored again.



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It was the kind of win that begins to put the Leafs disaster in the rear-view mirror, rather than a loss that would wake the ghosts of a humbling week for the Oilers.

"We played a really good team in Toronto that kind of snuffed us out and gave us a wakeup call. If we want to be a top team in this league, there are standards that have to be set," Smith said. "We're figuring that out. We're learning every day."

Little subtleties in play helped Oilers to comeback win

As usually happens when Edmonton plays Calgary these days, Edmonton's stars were simply better and more engaged than Calgary's.

Placed on a line together in the second period, Connor McDavid and Draisaitl forged the game's final two goals. First, a virtuoso pass from Draisaitl to Yamamoto, and then it was McDavid ripping a shot off the post and past Jacob Markstrom with 3:45 to play. On this night, the captain's pointless streak ended at just over 217 minutes.

Meanwhile, Johnny Gaudreau had one shot on goal all night — a game-opening power play goal — while Sean Monahan also had a single shot, adding a second assist on Gaudreau's goal. The Oilers' stars beat the Flames' stars, plain and simple.

"It's a big win," McDavid said. "When you're sliding like we were, sometimes it's tough to find a way out of it and I thought we did a great job as an entire group of just staying with it, sticking with it, holding onto that game even though we probably didn't get off to our best start."

"I loved the way we kind of held onto that one, so hopefully that builds us some momentum heading into a very big Ottawa series here this week."

Would you call it winning with your 'B' game?

I'm not sure that's the perfect description, but the Oilers met an opponent on Saturday that was hungry, physical and motivated, and after taking a few punches on the ropes they finished with a late K.O.

McDavid happy with way Oilers battled back against Flames

The boxing analogy comes in a game that featured two spirited scraps, as Darnell Nurse took on the giant, fighting Milan Lucic for the second time in his career. There are no losers when two big men like that are chuckin' knuckles, and the scrap made Lucic the only man in history to have earned a fighting major wearing two different sweaters in the Battle of Alberta.

Bravo, Milan.

"He's one of our leaders," head coach Dave Tippett said of Nurse. "Nobody can tell a player when to fight, why to fight... Those things happen. You're into battles in the game, and those are things people engage in to help your team win. To try to help gain momentum."

Down in Los Angeles on Saturday, where the Kings came back from a 3-0 deficit to win 4-3 in overtime, their head coach was talking about the dynamic of leadership:

"When your top players decide they've got to reel the game back in, and do it the right way, it's real easy to follow," Todd McLellan said. "When the Alpha decides to play the right way, everybody else follows."

Up in Edmonton, the Alphas fought, saved and scored their way out of a hellish slump.

Now, with Ottawa in for three, let's see what follows.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.07.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs 'have to look in the mirror' after being swept by Canucks

Luke Fox

March 7, 2021, 12:10 AM

We often describe this game we love with rugged adjectives.

Hockey is gritty and requires sandpaper. It's greasy and gutsy. Hard-nosed. A series of tough battles that will be won by the side triumphing in the dirty areas. Those ugly trenches.

The game can be looked at another way, too.

Fragile.

A disappointed Sheldon Keefe used that adjective twice on Saturday in the aftermath of his Toronto Maple Leafs' 4-2 defeat by the hand of the 21st-place Vancouver Canucks, who swept this mini-series without top-line centre Elias Pettersson in their lineup.

It marked the first comeback victory of Vancouver's campaign and the first set of consecutive regulation losses the Maple Leafs have suffered all year. It's also the first time Toronto superstars Auston Matthews and Mitchell Marner have both been held off the scoresheet in back-to-back games.

Remaining Time -0:37

Keefe looks for more active Maple Leafs offence against Canucks

Much like Game 1 of the series, Toronto ran up against a hot power-play and a razor-sharp goaltender in Thatcher Demko.

Unlike Thursday's defeat, however, the visitors controlled the run of play for the bulk of the night.

Brock Boeser converted net-front on a beautiful cross-ice J.T. Miller pass on an early rush with Matthews serving a high-sticking minor, but the Leafs responded with a pair of pretty passing plays on their own at even-strength.

John Tavares clapped a blast clean and high by Demko after a nifty one-touch area pass from winger Alexander Kerfoot. Then Jimmy Vesey converted a tic-tac-toe sequence from Jason Spezza and T.J. Brodie.

Toting a 2-1 lead into the third, Toronto fired the first nine shots of the final period and looked poised to lock up another 'W'.

Momentum spun on a dime when an unpressured William Nylander committed a puck-over-glass penalty — "Can't just give them a freebie like that," Keefe said — and Bo Horvat promptly tied the game with the man-advantage.

"We've got to get a kill. We've got to get a blocked shot. These are the kind of things that make a big difference," Keefe said. "We didn't really go through that in [sweeping] the Edmonton series. We were in full control. We built big leads for the most part."

The Canucks' power-play went a perfect 3-for-3 in the series; Toronto went 0-for-3. There's the difference.

"The power-play goal really gave them some life," Tavares said.

A pair of neutral zone giveaways by the Leafs led to odd-man rushes the other way. Bang, bang: A hungry Miller and Nils Hoglander cashed in.

In 42 seconds, a win poofed into a loss and a great road trip got downgraded to a good road trip.

Fragile.



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Beat on the Miller strike, fumbling at the puck first with his hands then with his feet, Morgan Rielly pointed to sloppy details: special teams, puck management and D-zone breakouts.

"We have to take responsibility for what happened in terms of two losses," Rielly said. "I mean, we have to look in the mirror."

Marner wondered if the top line was trying to force plays that weren't there.

"Sometimes it slips away. It happened tonight," said Marner, a minus-2 for the first time all season. "Turnovers were the reason for it, so just make sure we clean that part up. Obviously starting [with] myself."

The Maple Leafs will fly home Sunday and sharpen their details on Monday in preparation for next week's three-game series versus their nearest pursuers in the North, the Winnipeg Jets.

"These are really close, very fragile games. You've got to be good every single shift and every puck," Keefe said. "Vancouver plays four lines. They play extremely hard and very competitive. They don't give you anything for free."

"It just goes to show that, first of all, anybody in our division can beat you on any given night. We've got to be good all the time and we've got to stay with the process that works for us. Go off script and get the results you get here."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.07.2021

1205274 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames start hot, burn out vs. Oilers as new coach Sutter watches from afar

Eric Francis

March 7, 2021, 2:24 AM

The Jolly Rancher didn't even have to be behind the bench to start Sutterizing his new team.

While Darryl Sutter watched from his farmhouse in Viking, Alta., as part of his COVID-19 protocol, the Calgary Flames responded to his hiring with a first period that exhibited the type of spirited start the veteran taskmaster will be pushing for.

Fully engaged from puck drop, the Flames took it to the Oilers in a rugged fashion befitting the Battle of Alberta and Sutter's style.

Two first-period fights, 21 shots, a whopping 19 hits and a tenacious forecheck that led to a power play goal and a 1-0 lead.

Clearly they knew the boss was watching.

And then came the predictable drop-off that got Geoff Ward fired.

Failing to record a shot in the first seven minutes of the second, the Flames allowed the Oilers to push back and eventually even the game late in the frame.

From there the see-saw battle continued.

By night's end it was the Oilers earning kudos for persevering through a tough spell that ended with Connor McDavid's late goal, ending his club's three-game losing skid.

While there's little time in this shortened season to celebrate moral victories, no one could fault the Flames' effort on this one.

"It's obviously difficult to lose – I thought we had a really good start," said Noah Hanifin, whose first goal of the year early in the third put the Flames up 2-1 following the type of grind-em-out shift from Elias Lindholm's line Sutter would cherish.

"I think if we play that way and compete that way we'll have success more often than not. The one thing we're looking to improve on is our compete and work ethic and I think that was there tonight. It was a step in the right direction."

Perhaps Sutter's tack will include being furious with the mere suggestion progress was made.

However, it didn't seem there was much Sutter could fault his new troops on early in the third when Lindholm, Dillon Dube and Matthew Tkachuk put their work boots on for a series of battles down low that led to Hanifin's goal.

"When we have big, heavy shifts like that it's going to help us wear down teams and have success," the defenceman said.

"That's the game we want to play."

McDavid spoiled Ryan Huska's coaching debut by setting up a Kailer Yamamoto goal five minutes later, before picking up his third point of the night with a snipe from the face-off dot that bounced in off the far post with four minutes left.

"I think we played the whole game — I thought we played great," said Jacob Markstrom, who made 30 saves in his return from injury, yet still tried to fall on his sword post-game.

"The biggest difference tonight was goaltending. I think Smitty (Mike Smith) made a couple saves and I didn't when I needed to. It sucks feeling like you didn't bail out your teammates."

"I thought we played a great game over 60 minutes. There are obviously things to improve, but I think it's a step in the right direction. It sucks getting the loss out of this game when the guys played so well in front of me."

The highly entertaining display of big boy hockey saw the Oilers finish the night with two more hits than the Flames (42-40), and they deserve plenty of credit for the moxie they displayed throughout.

Darnell Nurse did his best to stop the Flames' early momentum by dropping the gloves with his former teammate and pal Milan Lucic, earning the latter the distinction of being the only player ever to earn a fighting major while playing on either side of the provincial punch-up.

James Neal fought Tkachuk later in the period with what would have brought the house down had there been fans at Rogers Place.

"I think (the emotion) was where it needs to be and that's the challenge moving forward," said Huska, whose NHL head coaching experience now matches the number of games he played in the show – one.

"The effort in the first period was really good. There was an emotional attachment to the game, which was important for us. That's something we have to work on maintaining for 60 minutes, not just the first period. I thought we gave up a little too much room as the game went on and we allowed them to get into our zone too easily, which is really how they got their three goals."

Huska will be behind the bench again Sunday night when the Flames host Ottawa.

Sutter expects to complete his COVID-19 protocol before joining the team for practice Tuesday and will make his return to the Flames' bench Thursday at home against Montreal.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Sportsnet.ca / Miller plays finest game to drive Canucks' comeback win over Maple Leafs

Iain MacIntyre

March 7, 2021, 12:31 AM

VANCOUVER -- J.T. Miller is so good, he hurts.

His combination of speed, skill and strength can be punishing. At his best, Miller is one of the top power forwards in the NHL, a beastly throwback to days when players hurt the opposition in front of the net and in the corners.

The Vancouver Canucks winger is so good in peak form that much less than that makes him an infuriating figure to his own team's fans. Miller is like a comic-book superhero whose powers are formidable whether applied towards good or evil.

He is an influencer, always part of the conversation in Vancouver.

Matched up head-to-head against one of the Toronto Maple Leafs' supermen, John Tavares on Saturday, Miller played one of his finest games since a trade from the Tampa Bay Lightning nearly two years ago brought him into the unyielding glare of a Canadian hockey market.

Miller scored the winning goal, assisted on two others, registered four shots, three hits and logged 22:42 of ice time to drive the Canucks to their first third-period comeback this season and a 4-2 win against the Maple Leafs.

Oh, and the winger did this while replacing injured Canucks star Elias Pettersson as the centre on a first-line that generated goals for Miller, Brock Boeser and Nils Hoglander.

The two-game sweep of the best team in Canada gave the Canucks their first consecutive wins since January, and the Leafs their first consecutive losses in regulation time.

"It feels pretty awesome and we know it in there," Miller told reporters on a Zoom call after emerging from the Canucks dressing room. "It means a lot to us. We take a lot of pride in beating a team like that at home twice when we really need wins. We talked a lot over the last three weeks or so about playing well but not getting the results. We've shown that we can beat anybody in the league, and we still believe that even though the record wouldn't necessarily show it. But it feels pretty awesome."

The Canucks bench exploded when Bo Horvat tipped in Boeser's power-play wrist shot to tie the game at 8:49 of the third period, and again 42 seconds later when Miller whacked a loose puck behind Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen after Boeser's shot broke the stick of Toronto defenceman T.J. Brodie and wobbled to his Vancouver linemate.

Hoglander then lasered a shot under the bar during a three-on-one at 16:53 after a turnover by Mitch Marner, another of the Leafs' stars. Toronto's Hart Trophy co-favourite, Auston Matthews, did not register a point in Vancouver.

Halfway through their 56-game schedule, it's a little late for the Canucks to be looking for turning points. They're 11-15-2 and have little likelihood of making the Stanley Cup Playoffs this spring.

But after going 0-13-1 the first 14 games before Saturday in which they trailed after two periods, and sweeping one of the NHL's best teams – and certainly the best one playing in the Canadian division – the victory felt like a launchpad for a much better second half.

"I think the second half is going to be a lot better, (but) we need to continue to find ways to get wins right now," Boeser said. "It was tough when you win one and you lose one, but to string two together against a team like this, a really solid hockey team, I think it just gives our team confidence."

"I think it'll give us confidence," coach Travis Green said. "I do think our team has been feeling good about their game. They haven't been getting the results. And that's been probably a mental fight with themselves. Even when you know you're playing well and you haven't won, it does get a little bit draining on you mentally. So this should help, hopefully. But I think our group also believes that they're a good team and they can play with anyone."

For what it's worth, the Canucks' 11 wins have been scattered across the six other teams in the division.

The Montreal Canadiens, who contributed to the Canucks' nadir during Vancouver's 0-5 visit to Montreal and Toronto a month ago, visit Rogers Arena for games Monday and Wednesday.

The Canucks would love to show the Canadiens their new-and-improved selves – the resilient, confident group that just swept the Leafs, that is getting big goals from its power play and elite goalkeeping from Thatcher Demko, whose 37 saves on Saturday included nine in a row early in the third period when Toronto led 2-1.

Remaining Time -1:37

Demko's brilliant third period gave Canucks ability to come back and win

"There has been a lot of talk locally, in our media, about what we're doing (before the trade deadline), trading players, stuff like that," Green said. "We haven't let any of that in our room. Our players don't want to hear that, our coaches don't want to hear that. It's only been half the season. We know that we probably should have a few more wins, and we (could) be having a lot of different conversations."

"It could be a big turning point," Miller said. "But we're not going to look too far. We're just going to enjoy tonight and get ready for the next one."

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Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Why the Maple Leafs' new ZIP Line is 'a juggernaut'

Luke Fox

March 6, 2021, 9:25 AM

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. Rest in peace, Walter Gretzky. We lost a beauty.

1. It's been almost as difficult to contain as it has been to name.

Only in the world of the hyper-analyzed, exhaustively covered Toronto Maple Leafs (guilty as charged) can a trio of role players be thrown together for four games and spark nearly as many acronyms as shifts.

Sheldon Keefe's newly formed third unit of Ilya Mikheyev, Pierre Engvall and Zach Hyman has been dubbed the MEH Line (because opponents' shrug and underestimate their prowess — to their own detriment); the HEM Line (due to their ability to stuff the Edmonton Oilers in their own zone); and the ZIP Line (thanks to their extreme speed).

After witnessing the three-headed forechecking monster's role in sweeping Edmonton this week, Mitch Marner offered a fourth nickname.

"It's a bit of a Juggernaut Line with the speed it has on it," Marner enthused. "A bunch of dogs, really. It's been fun to watch those three go to work."



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The ZIP Line (my favourite here) will start its fifth straight road game Saturday night, when Keefe's Leafs try to avenge Thursday's loss in Vancouver to the Canucks. Despite Hyman's minimal power-play time, the trio has produced five goals (at least one per night) and combined for 10 points on this trip.

The Leafs have long searched for a third line with an identity, one that can gel and provide a supplemental scoring punch on the odd night the \$40-million top-six can't do all the lifting.

Secure Hyman could complement anyone in the top six, Keefe wanted to reach outside the box and see if the pending UFA could drive his own shutdown line. Originally, Alexander Kerfoot was cast to pivot this group, but since Wayne Simmonds went down with a broken wrist, Kerfoot has found a niche on Tavares's wing. And Engvall, who failed to make the opening-night roster, has responded to some tough love.

"I knew he was going to be an important piece of our team here this season," Keefe said.

"We've made things harder on him to earn that opportunity, mainly because I just feel like with a player with his skillset, his size, his speed, his physicality, the potential that he has, I don't even know he realizes how good he can be. We didn't want to hand him anything."

Not only are the six-foot-five Engvall and six-foot-three Mikheyev large bodies. They're fast as gazelles, with eagle-like wingspans. More than ever, they're starting to use those gifts for good.

Case in point: Mikheyev out-hustling Connor McDavid on Wednesday in a long sprint.

"You don't see it often where it's a strict one-on-one race, hash mark to hash mark," Hyman said. "His speed was on display there. We know about it internally. He shows it all the time. But to see it against McDavid was obviously cool."

(These moments resonate. Playing some after-school keepaway on the pond when my 10-year-old Thursday, the kid chirped me: "C'mon, Dad! Do you have Mikheyev speed or just McDavid speed.")

Hyman points to the ZIP Line's pressure in all zones for their success. Quick breakouts. Immediate trouble on the dump-in. Three hounds, one bone.

"They've been really fun to play with. I feel like we have the puck a lot because we can all skate and we can all move up and down the ice really well," Hyman said. "We're trying to use their speed as much as possible and put the puck in position for both those guys to skate onto it and, once we're in the zone, just control some O-zone time."

Ever the chemist, Keefe still uses Hyman on Matthews' wing in critical situations and may throw Kerfoot back to 3C at some point.

But the coach is pleased with the ZIP Line right now — and we can't remember the last time the Leafs' third unit was getting rave reviews for a week straight.

"It's a lot of speed. A lot of tenacity on the puck," Keefe said. "The other lines have to be performing and have to be going well in order for us to maintain it with the injuries that we're working through. But we liked the idea of it, and the small sample it's been together, it's been effective."

"We like it on the road, especially, where matchups are difficult. Just to have a line like that you can feel pretty good about when you put them over the boards."

2. Hyman's superb play of late is all the more impressive considering he's skating on a badly battered foot.

Hyman missed two games in late February after taking a pair of hard shots off the boot. But he never left a game in progress. He said the play happens too fast to think: "Oh, I should get out of the way on this one."

How much does a clapper off the foot hurt? Well, Hyman once played half a playoff series with a torn ACL.

"You can battle through a little bit of pain," Hyman said. "I feel like I'm able to skate and do all the things that I can do otherwise. It's more painful not playing, to be honest."

The bruising could be worse. Hyman wears protective shot blockers over his skates, an addition to his equipment bag since his AHL days.

Hyman saw fellow Marlie Connor Brown get in a lane and suffer a broken foot on the penalty kill in 2015-16.

"And I'm like, 'I don't want that to happen to me,' so I decided to put it on," Hyman explained. "You have to get used to them a little bit, but I think it's extremely important because you can't control a puck hitting you in the foot. There's nothing you can do. It's just a part of the game. You can limit that damage. Give yourself a better chance to get out of it with a less of an injury."

Even hurting, Hyman is the model of consistency whenever he's fit to dress.

"We all know that when he puts his jersey on, he plays the same way, no matter what," Keefe said. "That's what we've come to expect."

3. Quote of the Week.

"The guy that's playing tonight was born in Russia." —Islanders coach Barry Trotz, playing coy with his starting goalie and generally not giving a flying fig about your fantasy team.

4. Topping the reasons the 2021 trade deadline could be sluggish — thin rental crop, quarantine conundrum, minimal playoff-gate incentive — is a serious lack of financial liquidity under this flat salary cap.

More than half the league is already using LTIR. Another handful have less than \$1 million in cap space, and most of the teams with wiggle room are rebuilding.

Four contenders stand out, then, because they have enough space to make a traditional pick-for-player rental trade (per CapFriendly.com). They'll just need to convince ownership to spend in tight times.

- Florida Panthers (\$5.8 in million projected cap space): Will rookie GM Bill Zito get the greenlight to invest in this surprising contender? If so, a young defenceman (Dante Fabbro, Vince Dunn) could be the play.

- Carolina Hurricanes (\$4.6 million): Carolina poked around the goalie market in the off-season, and Petr Mrazek's injury may inspire Don Waddell to bolster his depth in net. The GM needs clarity on UFA-to-be Dougie Hamilton, too.

- Boston Bruins (\$3.4 million): The core isn't getting younger. A left-shot defenceman or scoring winger won't hurt.

- Philadelphia Flyers (\$2.7 million): An experienced defender (Mattias Ekholm?) is the rumoured target of the day.

This is not to rule out the other Cup hopefuls, like Colorado, Toronto, Washington and Vegas, adding a piece; they'll just need to get creative.

5. That the sputtering Columbus Blue Jackets are searching for help up the middle after trading away Pierre-Luc Dubois and buying out Alexander Wennberg (Florida) should be of no surprise.

Captain Nick Foligno is a wonderful leader and excellent checker but, at 33, he's not going to be a driving playmaker. Alexandre Texier could well develop into a force, but the kid is 21. He's not there yet.

So, if GM Jarmo Kekalainen searches the NHL's top-100 point-getters or top-120 goal-scorers, he won't see a single Jackets centreman.

Jack Roslovic needs help.

The man who was supposed to seize the opportunity here is Max Domi, on his third team in four seasons. Domi has been given plenty of offensive opportunity. He's starting 56.3 per cent of his shifts in the fun end of the rink and gets power-play time.



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Alas, Domi has only three goals, seven points and a team-worst minus-11 rating through 25 games. He's currently skating on the wing.

6. Joe Thornton has a gift and a reputation for giving his teammates nicknames that stick.

Stuck in a house to serve his pre-camp quarantine with Mac Hollowell, Rasmus Sandin, Auston Matthews and Thornton, William Nylander was christened "Willy Styles" by Jumbo.

"He started calling me that, so I put that on my sticks now," Nylander said.

John Tavares believes the new handle suits his flashy Swedish friend's personality.

"Me and him always joke about how we're very opposite of each other, but we get along really well," Tavares said.

"People would see me as being a lot more reserved, a little bit quieter. And Willy's just a fun, outgoing guy and obviously likes to be a little bit different and showcase that, which is fantastic. It's part of who he is and what makes him a great person, a great teammate, a great player so, obviously, we love having him and those styles."

7. I'm a huge fan of cringe comedy. The original Office? Curb Your Enthusiasm? The Comeback? Bring it on.

Well, Zoom reporting — with its technical difficulties and accidental audio delays — has ushered in its fair share of heightened awkwardness and cringe-worthy moments.

Take this wonderfully atrocious exchange between Montreal's Jonathan Drouin and reporter John Lu, that has Drouin attempting to leave the podium three times. You can't script this stuff.

Très bien.

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TSN.CA / Leafs look to 'create chaos' to burst bubble Demko

By Mark Masters

The Maple Leafs held a media availability in Vancouver on Saturday afternoon.

To end this road trip on a high note, the Leafs need to find a way to beat Thatcher Demko, who stopped 31 of 32 shots on Thursday night.

"He made a couple big saves for them," said Auston Matthews, who fired five shots on net and hit a post late. "We had some quality opportunities there, especially at the end. He came up big. So, sometimes you just have to tip your hat."

"He looked really solid," said defenceman Justin Holl. "Not a lot of second-chance opportunities. Really good positionally. We need to get as many pucks on him as possible and try to create chaos in front of the net and get a couple greasy ones."

Demko is looking more and more like the goalie who pushed the Canucks to Game 7 against the Vegas Golden Knights in the Western Conference semifinals.

"You have to have a little extra poise and make good on your shots," said coach Sheldon Keefe. "Also, [don't] let him feel too good and give him any freebies or wasted shots. We want to make sure when we do shoot

the puck we have good presence there and we're shooting from good places."

Demko is 6-6-1 with a .924 save percentage since dropping his first three starts of the season. The American posted a 27-save shutout over the Jets earlier this week.

"We have to find a way to get some more pucks in and around the net and some seconds and thirds and rebounds," said captain John Tavares. "They do a good job around their net. They defend hard so we're going to have to find ways to up our game there."

Matthews tips his hat to Demko: 'He's really come into his own'

Thatcher Demko stopped 31 of 32 shots in a win over Toronto on Thursday. "Ever since the bubble and the playoffs last year he's really come into his own," said Auston Matthews. "He came up big. Sometimes you just have to tip your hat." Justin Holl says the plan will be to "create chaos in front of the net" during Saturday's rematch.

Matthews is due for a big night after being held off the scoresheet in both games since returning from a wrist injury. He knows Demko well and beat his former World Junior teammate twice in a game earlier this season.

"He's big [6-foot-4], takes up a lot of space and ever since the bubble and the playoffs last year he's really come into his own," said Matthews. "I've been fortunate to get to know him a bit and he's an awesome guy and really great person."

Matthews has now gone four consecutive games played without a goal, which is his longest drought since a five-game dry spell from Nov. 27 to Dec. 4, 2019. He has 19 shots on net in those four games.

Zach Hyman joined the top line with Matthews and Mitch Marner in the third period on Thursday replacing 41-year-old Joe Thornton, who saw only one shift in the final frame.

"We were chasing the game and wanted to shorten the bench and wanted to get Hyman back with Matthews and Mitch," Keefe explained. "I didn't really intend it to go the way that it did in terms of really shortening it down to three [lines], but it was just the way it worked. Once we got down two, I thought we really had to press for a bit to try to get at least one and I just kind of lost him there. That's really it. Things will be back to the way we started."

Thornton played just 11 minutes and 57 seconds, which was his lowest ice time in a game as a Leaf.

Intelligent Hockey: Auston Matthews has gone four straight games without a goal. Will that drought come to an end against the Canucks on Saturday night? @IntelligHockey reveals his best bets for Saturday's action. #LeafsForever <https://t.co/fl12cTeBp5> [pic.twitter.com/VqxhVbA2Ov](https://t.co/VqxhVbA2Ov)

— TSN EDGE (@TSN\_Edge) March 6, 2021

After playing three games in four nights and four in six, the Leafs finally got a chance to catch their breath.

"We're hoping after a day off yesterday we'll have better legs," Keefe said. "If we have better legs we think our execution will be better in all areas, especially defensively. We'll look to close on things a little bit quicker, try and get the puck back quicker. We want to generate more opportunities. We thought we had ample opportunities to score more than we did the other night, but still not enough."

The Canucks held a full practice on Friday. Neither team skated this morning due to the afternoon start time.

"We expect more of the same from Vancouver in terms of how they play and how they compete and how they skate and how quickly they come at us so we have to find a way to execute through that," Keefe said.

Keefe wants Leafs to keep generating chances against Demko



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Thatcher Demko shutdown the Maple Leafs in their last meeting and Sheldon Keefe wants his team to continue to generate chances against the Canucks netminder and capitalize when they can.

Michael Hutchinson allowed three goals on 28 shots on Thursday's loss. It was the first time since Feb. 15, a 6-5 overtime loss to the Senators, that the Leafs' starting goalie posted a sub .900 save percentage.

The second-period goal by Jake Virtanen was a bad-angle shot. It ended up being the game winner.

"The guy is skating down the boards and they have some guys coming to the net," Hutchinson recalled. "I flattened out a bit expecting the play for him to be to throw it in front or try and bank it off me low for a pad pass with their guys driving. As I was going down into the post, I saw his wrists open up and knew he was coming high. From there I just slipped off the post a little bit. It was just a little bit of a mess for me. It's definitely one I'd like to have back. It was an unfortunate goal at an unfortunate time of the game."

Toronto will have No. 1 goalie Frederik Andersen back between the pipes tonight. He was solid on Wednesday night in his return from a lower-body injury.

"Fredzilla was a beast," Matthews declared after the 26-save effort against Connor McDavid and company.

"I felt pretty good," Andersen said that night. "Felt pretty good right away."

Andersen is 13-2-5 with a .942 save percentage in his career against the Canucks. That's his highest save percentage against any opponent.

Jack Campbell skated again today, but still isn't ready to dress in a game. He re-aggravated a leg injury last Saturday while posting a shutout against the Oilers.

"I don't think he's frustrated," Keefe said. "I don't think Jack ever gets frustrated. He's a pretty positive guy. The fact he continues to be able to get on the ice every day is positive and he's making progress ... He's kind of taking it a day at a time."

Campbell initially sustained the injury on Jan. 24 in Calgary.

'Fredzilla was a beast': Andersen makes confident return to Leafs crease

After missing four games with a lower-body injury, Frederik Andersen returned to the Leafs crease on Wednesday stopping 26 of 27 shots in a win over Edmonton. "Fredzilla was a beast," declared Auston Matthews. It was Andersen's 12th win of the season, which ranks second in the NHL. "Felt pretty good right away and the guys did a good job keeping them to the outside," Andersen said.

Projected lines for Saturday's game in Vancouver:

Thornton - Matthews - Marnier

Kerfoot - Tavares - Nylander

Mikheyev - Engvall - Hyman

Vesey - Boyd - Spezza

Rielly - Brodie

Muzzin - Holl

Dermott - Bogosian

Andersen starts

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USA TODAY / Washington Capitals' Tom Wilson gets seven-game suspension for boarding Boston Bruins' Brandon Carlo

Mike Brehm

Washington Capitals forward Tom Wilson went more than two years without a suspension as he revised the way he checks.

But Friday night, he sent a player to the hospital with a heavy yet unpenalized hit, and the NHL came down hard Saturday with a seven-game suspension for boarding.

It's his fifth suspension and second-longest of his career. He'll forfeit \$311,781.61 in pay.

Wilson checked Brandon Carlo hard into the boards in the first period of Boston's 5-1 victory Friday night as the defenseman tried to locate a loose puck in his skates. Carlo immediately grabbed his head and appeared dazed as he needed help leaving the ice surface. He was released from the hospital Saturday morning.

The league agreed with the Capitals that Carlo and other unsuspecting players are eligible to be checked, but it issued the suspension because of the "totality of the circumstances" surrounding the hit.

"What separates this hit from others is the direct and significant contact to a defenseless player's face and head, causing a violent impact with the glass," the NHL said in its suspension video. "This is a player with a substantial disciplinary record taking advantage of a player who is in a defenseless position and doing so with significant force."

Wilson's history of suspensions includes one for 20 games for an illegal hit to the head of Oskar Sundqvist during the 2018-19 preseason. That was his fourth suspension in 105 games. The suspension was reduced to 14 games by an independent arbitrator.

His other suspensions were two games for a late hit, four games for boarding and three playoff games for an illegal check to the head that broke the jaw of the Pittsburgh Penguins' Zach Aston-Reese.

The Bruins came after Wilson on Friday night as the game progressed, with Boston's Jarrod Tinordi fighting him in the second period and Trent Frederic taking him on in the third period.

Wilson will be eligible to return on March 20 against the New York Rangers.

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USA TODAY / Islanders' Mathew Barzal adds to Sabres' woes with goal of the year candidate

Mike Brehm

As if the Buffalo Sabres weren't having enough trouble, they'll have to deal with an opponent's goal of the year candidate being on endless replay.

The goal was by the New York Islanders' Mathew Barzal as the speedy center tied the game 1-1 at 3:52 of the second period Saturday afternoon.

Starting in his own zone, Barzal churned his skates to chase a loose puck. Catching up to it, he tipped it with his stick to prevent a retrieval



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from Rasmus Ristolainen, then made a move that sent the Sabres defenseman tumbling.

Barzal then skated toward the net, pulled the puck and his stick through his legs and flipped a shot past a helpless Sabres goalie Carter Hutton.

"Especially this year, he's got a few pretty highlight-reel goals," Islanders captain Anders Lee said, "but that's high-level hockey right there and honestly just fun to see."

The Islanders went on to win 5-2 to extend the Sabres' losing streak to six games.

This shortened season has had its share of goal of the year candidates, including Chicago Blackhawks forward Patrick Kane's spinorama goal that would have made Denis Savard proud.

Or Minnesota Wild rookie Kirill Kaprizov's wraparound goal while he was falling.

There was even another candidate Saturday when the Florida Panthers' Jonathan Huberdeau pulled off a shootout-style stickhandling move on a breakaway.

But the Barzal goal drew a lot of praise.

Former NHL goalie Martin Biron even weighed in, referencing a similar goal by the San Jose Sharks' Tomas Hertl against him as part of a four-goal game in 2013.

"Just credit me for allowing Hertl to score a similar goal," he tweeted. "If I had stopped him back then, nobody would be trying things like that now!!!"

USA TODAY LOADED: 03.07.2021